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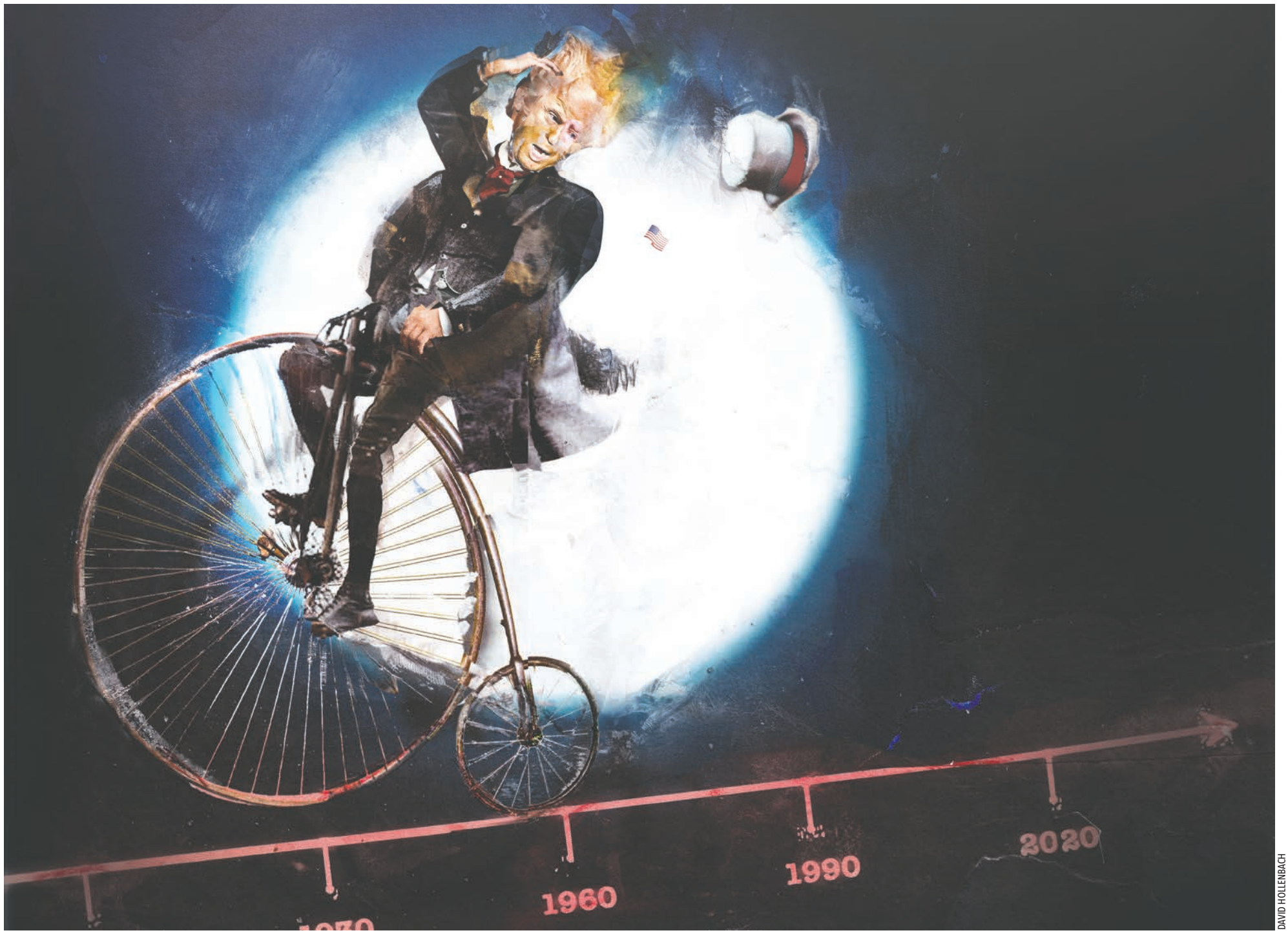
THE INDYPENDENT
293 FEBRUARY 2025



DAVID HOLLENBACH

BACK TO THE FUTURE

DONALD TRUMP WANTS TO REPEAL THE 20TH CENTURY. WHO'S READY TO STOP HIM?

BY JOHN TARLETON — P6

THE INDYPENDENT

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ANOTHER INDY VOICE

THIS PAPER IS A LABOR OF LOVE, BUT WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

By Amba Guerguerian

Even though I'm right in the middle of it, most of the time I can't really comprehend how *The Indypendent* — a free newspaper, a service to the people, a public commons — has been able to survive all these years. We started out in 2000 with a $500 grant. Now in 2025, we run on an annual budget of less than $100,000.

We have two staff members, a distribution team, some per diem workers who join us for each issue's publication process, and a valiant group of volunteer writers, photographers, copy editors and box watchers.

While we've continued to pump out our classic truth-to-power coverage over the past few years, things haven't been easy since COVID-19. Some of our largest donors have passed on, and we need our younger readers to pick up the slack.

We can't afford an office anymore, so we reserve library workspace when possible. Making very little money is not so easy. But we continue in our commitment to this newspaper because *The Indypendent* is a labor of love, and love is one of the core principles of fighting for a better world. Through the news we publish, we do just that. Driven by a love for our neighbors in this city, in this world, we dare to promote visions of love: versions of the systems dictating our lives that are focused on and run by the people.

Yes, of course I also love writing and putting together a newspaper. It's fun and rewarding. But more than anything, I love knowing the paper, full of articles you won't read anywhere else, is making it to you. When we are out in the streets refilling newspaper boxes, we get to run into our readers. I'm proud to say you all are the working class of New York City, that the working class reads empowering information about the struggles we face.

You all mostly send in small donations under $100. If we charged each of our readers just $10 per year, we wouldn't have to make this annual fund-drive push. But we believe that media should be free, and we want to reach as many readers as possible regardless of income. So we ask that some of our readers give more, knowing others can't afford to give anything.

Now, more than ever before, is the right time to support the *Indy*. Trump 2.0 is already worse than I expected. With Elon Musk and other broligarchs exposing themselves as neofascists, the news we receive on platforms like X, Instagram and Facebook is likely to become even more controlled than it already is. And the corporate media, beholden to owners with interests similar to those of Trump, is already falling in line. TV networks ABC and CBS have negotiated multi-million dollar settlements to nuisance lawsuits from Trump in the hope of placating him. The editorial boards of *The Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times* have been silenced by their paper's billionaire owners. In Milwaukee, television meteorologist Sam Kuffel was summarily fired by the local CBS affiliate one day after she criticized Elon Musk's fascist salute on her personal Instagram page.

Funded by our readers, we can't be censored! And we promise never to self-censor out of fear. We will keep reporting the stories that you won't read in any other local papers — even if they try to shut us down or drag us to jail — as long as we have the funding to do so. We're halfway to our winter fund drive goal of raising $50,000. I quite seriously implore you to give if you haven't already. Love thy neighbor. Love thy paper.

Amba Guerguerian

AMBA GUERGUERIAN
Managing Editor

FUND DRIVE UPDATE

AS WE GO TO PRESS, WE HAVE RAISED **$24,607**, OR NEARLY HALF OF OUR WINTER FUND DRIVE GOAL OF **$50,000**. TO HELP US MAKE IT THE REST OF THE WAY, GO TO **INDYPENDENT.ORG/DONATE**, USE THE QR CODE ON THIS PAGE OR SEND A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER TO THE INDYPENDENT//388 ATLANTIC AVE, 2ND FL//BROOKLYN, NY 11217 **THANK YOU!**

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Amy Goodman | Juan González | Nermeen Shaikh

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CALENDAR

SEDAT PAKAY

FEBRUARY

DEC 12—MAR 15 • FREE
PHOTO EXHIBIT: TURKEY SAVED MY LIFE – BALDWIN IN ISTANBUL, 1961–1971
In celebration of the centennial of James Baldwin's birth, *Turkey Saved My Life – Baldwin in Istanbul, 1961–1971* captures a pivotal period in Baldwin's life and work. Baldwin redefined himself in Turkey, gaining critical distance from America's racism and homophobia. Experience these intimate and liberating images of Baldwin as he found freedom away from American racial oppression.
BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY CENTRAL BRANCH
10 Grand Army Plaza
BKLYN

THU FEB 13 • 6:30—8:30PM • FREE
MUSIC: HARLEM CHAMBER PLAYERS 17TH ANNUAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION
Hosted by multidisciplinary artist Terrance McKnight, this event features the Harlem Chamber Players, a group of high-caliber professional classical musicians dedicated to providing accessible live music to the Harlem community and beyond. Pre-registration is available atnypl.org/events. Admission is first-come, first-served at the door. This is a can't-miss night of music and celebration!
THE SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE
515 Malcolm X Blvd.
MNHTN

FRI FEB 14 • 6PM • $30 DONATION
BENEFIT FOR VOCES CIUDADANAS
Join Voces Ciudadanas this Valentine's Day for a benefit and dance to support Voces Ciudadanas. Come with your partner to dance and have dinner while enjoying the music of DJ Fachoso. Your participation will help this important organization continue to offer art workshops, provide space to vendors and work for the Sunset Park community.
VOCES CIUDADANAS SPACE
475 41st St., basement
BKLYN

FEB 19—23 • $20 (STUDENTS & SENIORS $15)
THEATRE: THE SIX PATHS
Performances: Thu, Fri, Sat at 8PM, Sun at 3PM. The Six Paths is a spiritual exploration of Vietnamese Buddhism, telling the story of a young demon grappling with his identity and purpose in the universe. Created by My Le, the youngest director in Vietnam to debut at the Hanoi Opera House.
THEATER FOR THE NEW CITY
155 First Ave.
MNHTN

FEB 22 @ 4PM, FEB 24 @ 7:45PM & FEB 26 @ 8:15PM
FILM: *SOUNDTRACK TO A COUP D´ETAT*
United Nations, 1960: the Global South ignites a political earthquake, jazz musicians Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach crash the Security Council, Nikita Khrushchev bangs his shoe, and the U.S. State Department swings into action, sending jazz ambassador Louis Armstrong to Congo to deflect attention from the CIA-backed coup. Director Johan Grimonprez captures the moment when African politics and American jazz collided in this magnificent essay film, a riveting historical rollercoaster that illuminates the political machinations behind the 1961 assassination of Congo leader Patrice Lumumba and resonates more than ever in today's geopolitical climate.
DCTV FIREHOUSE CINEMA
87 Lafayette St.
MNHTN

SUN FEB 23 • 2—8PM • DONATION
BLACK HISTORY MONTH PUNK SHOWCASE
Live music and poetry: Honeychild + Biz/The 18650/Faith NYC/Madame St. Beatrice/Already Late/Lollirot. Hosted by Flora-Morena Ferreira Lucini.
P.I.T. (PROPERTY IS THEFT)
411 S. 5th St.
BKLYN

TUE FEB 25 & THU FEB 27—APR 3 • 6:30—8:30PM • FREE (DONATIONS ACCEPTED)
COURSE: OUR FREEDOM CAN'T WAIT! THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK LIBERATION: PAST AND PRESENT
A free educational course offered to activists and revolutionaries worldwide. The course focuses on the history and global struggle for Black liberation, its central role in the fight against capitalism and imperialism, and key lessons applicable to today's movements. Meet new friends and comrades, exchange ideas, study, discuss and put theory into practice!
THE PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W. 37th St. .
MNHTN

THU FEB 27 • 7—9PM • $7—$15
FILM: *SURVIVAL BLUES* – JACKIE McLEAN ON MARS + CHARLES MINGUS
Two cinematic portraits – one of Jackie McLean as he pivots to academia in lieu of work, and the other of Charles Mingus on the eve of eviction from his NYC apartment – illustrate the harsh economic reality for practicing jazz musicians, even at the height of their creative powers. Screenings followed by a solo bass performance from Brandon Lopez! Tickets via maysles.org. Call (646)-853-1296 for assistance.
MAYSLES DOCUMENTARY CENTER
343 Malcolm X Blvd.
MNHTN

THU MAR 6 • 7—10PM • $0—$17
VARIETY SHOW: BUSHWICK'S GOT TALENT
Come and be astounded by these brave artists as they step into the spotlight and become the next superstars of the stage! Expect anything and everything from live music, sideshow, comedy, drag, circus, burlesque, dance, acrobatics, experimental nonsense, puppets. Tickets: https://shorturl.at/sVEEZ.
HOUSE OF YES
2 Wyckoff Ave.
BKLYN

SAT MAR 8 • 6—8PM • FREE
OPEN RECEPTION: JAMEL SHABAZZ – *SECONDS OF MY LIFE*
The exhibition *Seconds of My Life: Photographs from 1975–2024* by Brooklyn-based photographer Jamel Shabazz offers a comprehensive look at his work, highlighting his talent for capturing powerful stories of identity, resilience and community from the streets of New York. The exhibition will be on view Feb 28–Apr 20, and the center's hours are Thu–Fri 3–7PM and Sat–Sun 1–5PM

BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES:
The Brooklyn Central Library is hosting a photo exhibit on James Baldwin's time living in Istanbul, Turkey from 1961-1971.

BRONX DOCUMENTARY CENTER
364 E. 151st St.
BRONX

EVERYDAY • 10:30AM—6PM • FREE
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART: FREE 25 AND UNDER
Admission to the Whitney is now free every day for visitors 25 and under. Visitors can enjoy free access to exhibitions, special programming, and views of the Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building and more from the Museum's iconic terraces.
WHITNEY MUSEUM
99 Gansevoort St. |
MNHTN

NYC BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

COP CAR CHASES PLUMMET

New York police car chases fell by two-thirds in the two weeks after the department announced a policy to limit them, Commissioner Jessica Tisch said in her Jan. 29 State of the NYPD speech. The revised policy prohibits chasing a fleeing vehicle at high speeds except in cases of suspected felonies or violent misdemeanors. Responding to an increase in reckless driving and cars with fake or covered license plates, the department, backed by Mayor Eric Adams, had adopted a more aggressive policy in late 2022. But in 2024, according to police figures, one-fourth of the almost 2,300 vehicle pursuits resulted in a crash, property damage or physical harm. Two-thirds of the chases involved drivers who fled being stopped. Pursuits for traffic violations and low-level crimes "can be both potentially dangerous and unnecessary," Tisch said in announcing the new policy, which went into effect Feb. 1.

HITTING THE BRAKES: *The NYPD will be engaged in fewer high-speed car chases under rules of engagement issued by Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch.*

WOMAN WHO SURVIVED NAZIS AND CHERNOBYL KILLED WHILE CROSSING STREET

A 95-year-old Ukrainian immigrant who survived the Nazi occupation and the Chernobyl disaster was killed Jan. 23 when she was struck by a van while crossing the street near her apartment. Mayya Gil, police and family members told *Gothamist*, was on Cropsey Avenue with her home health aide, who was hospitalized in stable condition. No charges were filed against the driver, police said. Gil, from the small city of Khmelnytskyi, fled to Kyiv after the Nazis invaded in 1941, when she was 12, escaping the extermination suffered by the 12,000 Jews who stayed. She, her late husband and their two daughters moved to New York after the 1986 meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant near Kyiv contaminated much of the area. Family members said the great-grandmother of seven was very active in Bensonhurst's Jewish community. Transportation Alternatives said 46 elderly pedestrians were killed in car crashes in the city last year.

HOCHUL, PROSECUTORS TARGET DISCOVERY-LAW REFORMS

Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch and a state prosecutors organization have both endorsed Gov. Kathy Hochul's proposal to roll back the state's 2019 law requiring prosecutors to share evidence with defense attorneys. The law has "led to the dismissal of thousands of felony and misdemeanor cases," Staten Island District Attorney Michael E. McMahon, president of the state DAs association, said Jan. 31. Gov. Hochul wants to relax deadlines for turning evidence over and limit it to what prosecutors consider relevant. According to state court figures, 62% of criminal cases resolved in 2023 were dismissed, up from 42% in 2019. The discovery requirements have prevented wrongful convictions and prolonged pretrial detention, said Tina Luongo, head of the Legal Aid Society's criminal-defense practice. "Reverting to a practice that denies accused people access to the evidence in their cases does nothing to enhance public safety." Prosecutors should implement systems to ensure the timely sharing of evidence, she added.

TRUMP ENDS PROTECTED STATUS FOR VENEZUELANS

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem signed an order ending Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans on Feb. 1, exposing roughly 600,000 immigrants to deportation, some as soon as April. They had been legally admitted to the U.S. under the TPS program, which covers immigrants from 17 countries declared too unstable or unsafe for them to return to, and had paid up to $545 in fees for permits to stay and work. But Secretary Noem, who last year published a book proudly proclaiming that she'd executed her family's pet dog and goat, revoked a Biden administration order that extended TPS for Venezuelans until 2026. The first Trump Administration imposed draconian economic sanctions on Venezuela that sent inflation soaring to more than 1 million percent. "There's no resources, no hospitals, schools, nothing," Elianys Palma, a 30-year-old mother of two, told *The City* on Jan. 29 after she'd applied to extend her stay. Venezuelans make up more than one-third of the people in New York's shelters for immigrants.

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

TRUMP PURGES NLRB

On Jan. 27, Donald Trump fired National Labor Relations Board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, the NLRB's most pro-labor counsel in decades, and Democratic board member Gwynne Wilcox. Wilcox's firing was illegal under federal law, which bars the president from axing NLRB members before their term is up except "for neglect of duty or malfeasance in office." The move leaves the board with only two members, not enough to rule on cases. Democrats had a 3-1 majority until December, when the Senate blocked President Joe Biden's renomination of chair Lauren McFerran. In the termination email, obtained by reporter Josh Eidelson, the two were told that Trump believed that the NLRB's November 2024 ruling banning mandatory anti-union "captive audience" meetings "improperly cabined employers' rights to speak on the subject of unionization." Wilcox said she would pursue "all legal avenues to challenge my removal, which violates long-standing Supreme Court precedent." That might be what the administration wants, though: It advocates a legal theory called "unitary executive," which holds that Congress cannot limit the President's power to fire any government official. Trump consigliere Elon Musk is using that claim in his lawsuit to have the NLRB declared unconstitutional.

CLOSING OF UNIONIZED PARK SLOPE STARBUCKS SPARKS PROTESTS

Seven people were arrested Jan. 28 in a protest at a Park Slope Starbucks that was scheduled to close three days later — one of seven coffeehouses the company has closed after their workers joined a union. Workers at the store at 166 Seventh Ave., who had joined Starbucks Workers United last October, announced they were walking out at noon, joined by several dozen supporters chanting, "No contract, no coffee!" The seven protesters who remained inside were arrested an hour later. The union filed an unfair labor practice complaint with the National Labor Relations Board Jan. 15, accusing Starbucks of closing seven shops "in retaliation for workers' protected, concerted activities." As of Jan. 17, the NLRB had certified bargaining units at 537 Starbucks locations, but none had reached a contract agreement with the company. Striking barista Sammy Schachter told *Hell Gate* that Starbucks management was "merciless" and was refusing to negotiate.

PHILLY WHOLE FOODS WORKERS BEAT JEFF BEZOS

SACKED: *Former National Labor Relations Board General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo made it easier for workers to unionize.*

Workers at a Whole Foods supermarket in Philadelphia's Fairmount neighborhood became the first store in the Amazon-owned chain to unionize on Jan. 27, when they voted 130–100 to join the United Food and Commercial Workers. The victory came despite what one of the leaders of the organizing drive called a "wild, super-intense union-busting" campaign, firing union supporters, holding captive-audience meetings and bringing in new supervisors. Management "brought in some lady from Florida to union-bust," Ed Dupree, who's worked in the produce department for eight years, told *Jacobin*. "She'd always be surveilling me and dead-on staring at me during my shift, as I'm literally just stacking apples." "Winning felt like a thread of positivity in the face of so much negativity in the company and in the country," he added.

GOVERNMENT WORKERS UNDER ATTACK

The Trump Administration sent 2 million federal employees a buyout offer Jan. 28: If they resigned, they would be put on paid leave until Sept. 30; if they didn't, they would risk getting laid off or fired. The message almost duplicated the one sent by Trump's personnel czar, Elon Musk, when he purged Twitter's workforce in 2022. It was sent to federal air-traffic controllers the day before a midair collision near the understaffed Reagan National Airport in Washington killed 67 people. The American Federation of Government Employees warned members Feb. 3 not to resign, saying there was no guarantee the buyout was legal or that the administration would keep its promises. AFGE President Everett Kelley said the scheme's goal was to turn federal workplaces into "a toxic environment," which would "cause chaos for the Americans who depend on a functioning federal government." Axios reported Feb. 4 that a senior administration official said about 20,000 federal workers had taken the buyout.

DAVID HOLLENBACH

REPI 20TH

THE RIGHT-WING'S LONG-SOUGHT GOAL IS NOW WITHIN REACH

By John Tarleton

Since Trump's inauguration, the barrage events of has been overwhelming. More than 1,500 January 6th insurrectionists pardoned. Tariffs threatened and withdrawn. Musing about invading allied nations. Illegal firings of apolitical civil servants. Planes falling out of the sky. Reality TV-style immigration raids. Sensitive computer systems that dispense trillions of dollars in payments hacked by the world's richest man and his acolytes. And so much more.

Amid the day-to-day onslaught of norm-busting power grabs, can we see the proverbial forest amid the trees?

To keep track of what's going on, I organize the daily news into four categories: repealing the 20th century, controlling the security forces, personal enrichment and where is the opposition?

For starters, let's step back and take the long view. The 20th century was the "American century" as Henry Luce, publisher of Time and Life magazines, proclaimed in 1941. The United States became the wealthiest nation in the history of the world. Its corporations spread around the globe, as did American culture. This was enabled by the power of big government in the form of the military and the intelligence agencies that provided the muscle that kept the world safe for American capital.

It was also the U.S. government that guided the country out of the morass of the Great Depression in the 1930s and to victory over fascism in World War II.

When Franklin Roosevelt became president in 1933, the unemployment rate was 25%, hunger was widespread, and bank failures that left depositors penniless were a daily occurrence. Support for long-standing dogmas in favor of small government had collapsed.

Public works programs were enacted. Millions of men had a weekly paycheck again. The Federal Deposit Insurance Company was created to ensure the solvency of banks. The Glass-Steagall Act was passed to separate commercial and investment banking so that banks couldn't gamble with their depositors' money. The Securities and Exchange Commission was created to police shady dealings in the stock market. Subsequent New Deal measures birthed Social Security and fueled the growth of labor unions. This in turn fueled consumer demand for the products that businesses were producing.

Roosevelt laid the groundwork for decades of robust economic growth whose benefits would be more widely shared than anytime in U.S. history. On his way to winning a landslide re-election in 1936, he told his supporters he welcomed the hatred of the "economic royalists" of his time — the Rockefellers, the DuPonts and the Mellons, among others.

After the war, it was big government that built interstate highways and sponsored home mortgage loans (at least for white people), making possible the postwar suburban boom. One real estate developer who made a fortune building government subsidized mid-20th-century affordable housing was Fred Trump, father of Donald. It was also big government that passed the GI Bill for millions of returning vets and created low-cost public universities that threw open the doors to a college education for children of the working class for the first time.

Cold War military spending and the government-backed space race of the 1960s fueled the growth of the early computer industry and Silicon Valley. The internet, after all, evolved out of ARPANET, a Defense Department project to create a computer network that could survive nuclear war.

More recently, a raft of government subsidies and contracts for Tesla and SpaceX helped make Elon Musk the richest man in the world. Which brings us to the present moment. Silicon Valley moguls and other modern-day economic royalists think they did it all themselves and want to dismantle the state that made their spectacular wealth possible.

EALING THE CENTURY

The right wing never reconciled itself to the egalitarian tendencies embedded in the post-1933 New Deal state. And while conservatives have succeeded in weakening the parts of the federal government that serve the general public since the Reagan era, they haven't been able to realize their dream of making the government so small that "it could be drowned in a bathtub," as conservative anti-tax activist Grover Nordquist famously called for. Until now.

"This is our shot. This is the best hand of cards we're ever going to have," Elon Musk told his followers on X on Feb. 3.

Trump has always been ambiguous about which idealized era of the past he wants to lead the country back to. In 2016, there were a lot of nods to Boomer nostalgia for the 1950s, a time when post-war America dominated the global economy and its factories were humming. A high school graduate could get a full-time job in those factories and — thanks to union contracts — earn enough money to support a wife and kids, buy a home and retire with a nice pension. The white working class never had it so good before or since. Trump played to that. For Americans who didn't welcome the cultural upheavals of the '60s and '70s that empowered Black people, Latinos, women, gays and other marginalized groups, the America of their youth was a "simpler time" that need to be restored. It was also a time when immigration was at an all-time low thanks to nativist laws passed in the 1920s.

MAGA's original, unrealized goal was to return to 1956. Regardless of all the futuristic allusions to crypto-currency and manned flights to Mars, this time, the goal of Trump, Musk and friends is to return to 1896, a much more ominous destination.

That was the year Trump's hero, William McKinley, was elected president with the full support of the titans of industry. There still was no income tax, no minimum wage and little in the way of government regulation. Financial panics were a recurring problem. Labor unions were almost non-existent, and strikes were often violently suppressed. Twenty five percent of all children died before the age of five (compared to less than 1% today) due to poor sanitation and a lack of vaccines for deadly diseases like measles and diphtheria (looking at you, RFK Jr.).

The federal government was too small and weak to challenge the abuses of the Gilded Age robber barons. It garnered most of its limited revenues from tariffs on imported goods.

McKinley started a war against Spain, seizing its colonial possessions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam — a land grab Trump hopes to surpass by gaining control of Greenland, the Panama Canal and Gaza.

1896 was also the year of Plessy v. Ferguson, a Supreme Court ruling that upheld legal segregation and the doctrine of "separate but equal," which saw starkly unequal outcomes in everything from public schools to public water fountains. Don't be surprised if conservatives mount a legal challenge to the 1964 Civil Rights Act that guarantees equal access to public accommodations and the right to be served by private businesses.

Women also had few legal rights in 1896 and were under the control of first their fathers, then their husbands. Abortion was illegal in all 50 states as was birth control, due to the 1873 Comstock Act, a broadly written "anti-obscenity" statute that congressional Republicans have made noises about reviving.

CONTROLLING THE SECURITY FORCES

Trump's authoritarian tendencies were stymied during his first term by establishment Republicans who held key administration posts. Former Raytheon lobbyist-turned-Defense Secretary Mark Esper refused to send thousands of active-duty troops into cities that saw large George Floyd protests in June 2020. William Barr resigned as Attorney General in December 2020 when he realized Trump wasn't going to stop whipping his followers into a violent frenzy with his stolen-election conspiracy theory. Before he left, Barr prevented the White House from making Trump sycophant Kash Patel deputy FBI Director, vowing it would only happen "over my dead body."

This time, Trump has made former Fox & Friends co-host Pete Hegseth defense secretary. Hegseth has vowed to purge "woke" generals who are not sufficiently pro-Trump. He has already directly involved the military in deporting hundreds of undocumented immigrants, and, if directed to do so, he would almost certainly follow Trump's orders to use the military to crack down on civilian protesters.

At the Justice Department, former corporate lobbyist and election denier Pam Bondi has been confirmed as attorney general, while Kash Patel has been nominated as FBI director. Patel wrote a 2023 children' book lionizing "King Donald" and has previously vowed to target Trump's political enemies.

Trump pardoned all 1,500-plus January 6th insurrectionists on the first day of his presidency. As *The Indypendent* goes to press, the Justice Department is demanding that the FBI provide a list of at least 6,000 current and former FBI agents and employees who participated in the investigation and prosecution of crimes and abuses of power by Donald Trump and by those acting at his behest. At the same time, the purge of the security services has been extended to the CIA, where roughly all 21,000 employees have been offered buyouts so they can be replaced with Trump loyalists.

This all tracks with Trump's return to the 19th century. In the early decades of the republic, all federal jobs turned over when a new president took office. The "spoils system" rewarded political loyalists but was a lousy way to run a country. When newly elected President James Garfield was assassinated in 1881 by a disgruntled job seeker, public outcry led to the creation of an apolitical, merit-based civil service where only the top positions would be held by political appointees. Replacing the current workforce with modern-day spoilsmen is a recipe for disaster.

PERSONAL ENRICHMENT

In his first term, Donald Trump raked in millions of dollars from favor seekers who stayed at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C., or who became members of the Mar-a-Lago Club at his estate in West Palm Beach, Florida. Days before his inauguration, the wily old grifter showed he still had game and then some when he rolled out his "$Trump" meme coin (a cryptocurrency), which quickly soared to a market capitalization of more than $15 billion. His wife's "$Melania" meme coin followed soon after and also raked in billions. As *The Indy* goes to press, $Trump has shed 75%of its value, and $Melania has lost 90%, to the chagrin of the Trump fans who bought into these ponzi schemes.

Trump will have more chances to boost the value of his crypto assets. His White House cryptocurrency director, David Sacks, is a Silicon Valley billionaire who has promised to lightly regulate crypto. Trump has also floated the idea of establishing a $50 billion national cryptocurrency reserve, which would pump up the price of crypto assets.

Meanwhile, Trump's co-president Elon Musk, whose companies receive billions in government contracts, is up to his eyeballs in conflicts of interest.

Musk heads the fictitious Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). With Trump's blessing, Musk and his young tech bro acolytes have gained control of key government computer systems, including the personnel records of the government's more than 2 million civilian employees and the Treasury Department's payment system, which sends out the $6 trillion in payments the government makes each year. Musk has likely gained the social security numbers of millions of Americans. This conveniently follows on the heels of X signing a deal with Visa to offer real-time payments on the social media platform — moving it one step closer to becoming the "everything app" that Musk has long envisioned.

Every suggests this is going to be an epic smash-and-grab for Trump and his fellow oligarchs as they try to get their hands on everything that's not nailed down. With regulation and government oversight out of fashion, we can also expect an unprecedented corporate crime wave.

SIGNS OF OPPOSITION

"Do your job!" protesters chanted at a group of Democratic lawmakers who appeared at a Feb. 5 rally near Capitol Hill.

No one has been less prepared for Trump's second-term blitzkrieg than the hapless Democratic Party leaders who previously campaigned against him as an existential threat to American democracy — only to fall silent as he and Elon Musk make one brazen power grab after another.

The pink pussy hats may have been cringe, but the Resistance's mass protests from 2017 to 2020 blunted Trump's political momentum in his first term, catalyzed the Democrats' victory in 2018 and 2020, and helped give rise to the leftwing Squad led by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. The Resistance's mistake was its deference to, bordering on hero worship of, the same washed-up party leaders who led the Democrats to defeat in 2016 and again in 2024.

Millions of rank-and-file Democrats sought reassurance in familiar figures like Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer and Joe Biden, who appeared to offer a safe harbor amid the stormy seas stirred by the Trumpian tempest. As the Democrats grasp that venerating outdated norms and institutions is a fool's errand, the realization that their failed leaders have nothing to offer is sinking in.

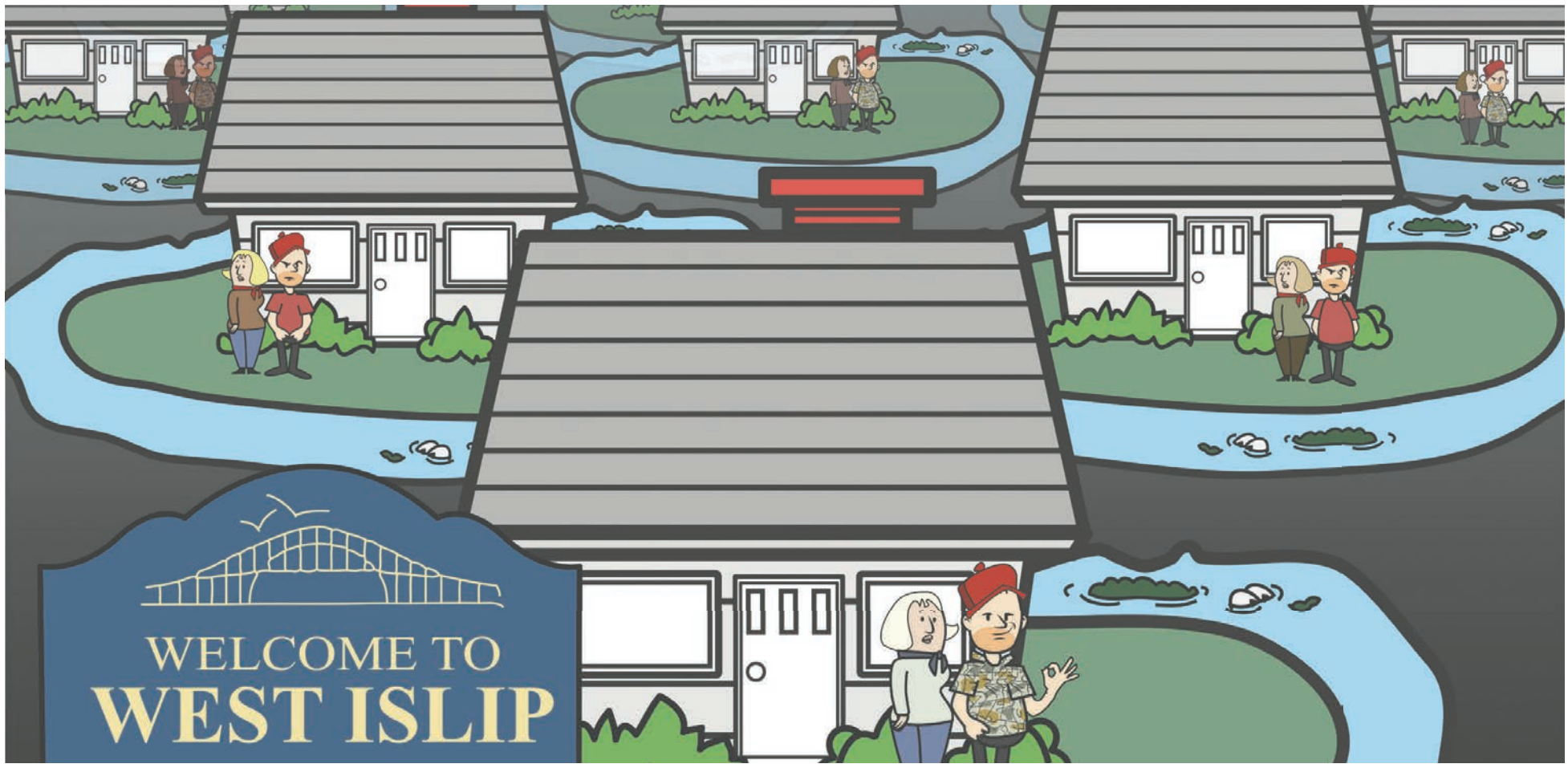
"I have been a loyal 'normie Dem' my whole life," tweeted Shannon Watts, founder of the gun control group Moms Demand, "but to watch them make millions off of stock trades, cozy up to people they admitted were fascists, trade obligation for access, and play internal politics while democracy is destroyed is a disappointment I don't have words for."

"All of us should challenge all of these people all the time," wrote former Capitol Hill reporter Meredith Shiner in The New Republic. She announced she is forming an exploratory committee to run against longtime Senator Dick Durbin (D-Illinois). "It costs nothing of us other than the mental energy and commitment to be a nuisance to politicians who could stand to be bothered by actual normal people, as opposed to the carousel of donors and consultants who've helped bring the Democratic Party to this particular nadir," wrote Shiner.

Liberalism is exhausted. It's more likely to enable fascism than fight it. That millions of disillusioned Democrats are done with their leaders is a glimmer of hope in these dark times. If the left can overcome its tendency to stand apart from a fallen world, there is a remarkable organizing opportunity to be seized. We need way more people in the streets making their opposition visible. We need more labor and tenant unions confronting bosses and landlords. We need more mutual-aid groups collaborating with immigrants and other targeted people. And a whole generation of feckless, sold-out Democratic Party incumbents need to be kicked to the curb in next year's congressional primaries.

Is it too late to stop Trump and the broligarchy? I couldn't tell you. But two things are certain. One, if we don't fight back, the bad guys will most certainly prevail. And two, only the left can supply the energy, the ideas and the determination to confront this rising tide of fascism. Will we step up and meet the moment?

DANIEL PENNY & THE RISE OF MAGA LONG ISLAND



GARY MARTIN

By John Teufel

Until recently, probably the most famous person to hail from my hometown of West Islip, Long Island, New York, was the actor Ken Marino, star of *Wet Hot American Summer*, *Party Down* and other entertainment fare. Marino is a good "most famous." People like him. He's handsome. Hasn't been cancelled. Ken Marino, the local boy who made good.

But Marino's been replaced. The most famous West Islip alum now is Daniel Penny, who choked a Black man named Jordan Neely to death on a New York City subway train because Neely was yelling about his suffering as a homeless person. Daniel Penny, the local boy who killed a guy. I don't think Ken Marino ever got a skybox with the President at a football game.

I wanted to shrug off my shared history with Penny as a sad twist of life. But the very same day Penny was acquitted, the West Islip basketball team made the news for hurling racial slurs at a rival team. And I watched a popular West Islip Facebook group hail Penny in almost messianic terms. With all this staring me in the face, I was forced to think more deeply about the town that gave me a genuinely beautiful childhood — even while it was infamously known to both residents and outsiders as "White Islip."

West Islip is technically a hamlet and school district in the Town of Islip in Suffolk County. I lived there for the first 18 years of my life and for a few random months in my 20s as I halfheartedly tried to kick an alcohol habit. There's a lot to love about West Islip. It's no mystery why families flock to Suffolk or why housing prices are through the roof. West Islip in particular boasts wildly easy beach access, as the bridge to Robert Moses State Park runs right through town. My house growing up was 10 minutes away from the beach without traffic. My grandparents lived in town on the Great South Bay and had a houseboat, so we spent two weeks every summer on Fire Island (the not gay part). A lot of my friends surfed. Growing up in West Islip means the beach never leaves you.

West Islip is safe. Murders are essentially non-existent. A common gripe during my teenage years was that the cops had nothing to do other than bust kids for drinking and smoking weed (which was an accurate complaint). By 10 years old, I was allowed to ride my bike alone pretty much wherever I wanted. Maybe it was being raised in this bubble, fostering an idealized sense of security, that led Penny to react murderously when confronted with a man raising his voice.

A Black man raising his voice, to be specific. In "White Islip," Penny could not have been around many Black people growing up. While some boomers will insist that the genesis of the town's nickname is the amount of cocaine that flowed through it in the '70s, my friends and I always knew it to refer to the town's racial makeup.

I can remember a total of one Black person in my entire high school, which had around 1,600 students. I don't think there were any Asians or Latinos, and very few Jews. Based on the 2020 census stats, it's diversified slightly since my time there, but the town is still 86% white and just 0.7% Black. Contrast that to Bay Shore, the town directly to West Islip's east, which is nearly 20% Black. North Babylon, directly west, is 7% Black.

We are an outlier, even for Long Island. And this can't be blamed on wealth. West Islip these days has wealthy residents, but it's not a haven for the rich like the Hamptons or some towns on the north shore. My friends' parents were teachers, nurses and cops. White Islip is a deliberate creation, no doubt owing partly to realtors like the one uncovered by *Newsday* in 2019 who referred to the town using its infamous nickname while he was training other realtors in… fair housing laws.

Penny almost certainly did not grow up casually tossing around N-bombs. Rarely did I witness racism that blatant. Instead, the West Islip I've known displayed a strong vein of ethnic tribalism — Blacks and whites belong with their own. On a recent visit home, one lifelong West Islip resident tried to convince me that "not wanting to live around Blacks" was not, per se, racist. This leads to a natural skepticism, even fear, of all things New York City, which I felt (particularly from older residents) on every visit back after I moved to New York City in 2002. I've never met Penny. But I know that apart from his stint in the military, he lived in West Islip his entire life. He carried this history onto that subway car with him.

Now, West Islip is also a MAGA stronghold. Every single voting district in the town went for Trump by more than 65%. In the run-up to the last election, Trump signs were on copious display. One house I had to pass frequently when visiting family had a massive poster of a jacked, shirtless Trump holding a machine gun like an '80s action star.

West Islip is in many ways a microcosm of how Trump came to power. A good chunk of its population is now comfortable-bordering-on-rich, and its southern side, which adjoins the Bay, is dotted with McMansions that in recent years have replaced the old wood and brick ranches built in the '50s and '60s. But West Islip thrives on working-class vibes, with moms who shop at big-box stores and dads who drive Ford trucks. Public school is the norm. Much of the wealth comes not from law or medicine, but construction and entrepreneurship. WASPs are a distinct minority; the town is heavily Italian. And as in much of downstate white New York, religion is an afterthought, with Bible thumpers seen as freaks. Such factors, combined with the racial makeup, primed the town to become a bastion of Trumpism. These were people our politics forgot — irreligious, economically comfortable, white and strongly resentful of anything smelling like elitism.

Trump and Penny are inextricably tied, something Penny has welcomed. Even as he has mostly kept his head down after getting away with murder, he accepted Trump's high profile skybox invite. Penny was destined to become another Kyle Rittenhouse, a killer-turned-MAGA-hero. West Islip is feting him openly, at least if the town's Facebook page is a good gauge. Posts celebrating his acquittal garner hundreds of hearts and likes, with not a single critical reply to be seen. "Our WI hero!!!;" "AMEN!!! GOD IS GOOD;" "A hero in every respect." One would think Penny just made the game-winning shot in the NBA playoffs.

When I read that Facebook page, with its posts threatening gun violence against intruders or excusing and downplaying the racist basketball incident, I feel like I barely know the town I came from. I left when I was only 18. Were things always so bleak? Some memories peek through — a father casually correcting his son in front of me for referring to "gay people" instead of "fags." But when I came out of the closet, to a tee, every friend of mine stood with me. Was it Trump? Or did decades of racial exclusivity and the rising cost of living curdle the population? The home I grew up in was once for the middle class. Now Zillow has it at $840,000.

What I know is this. The weight of West Islip, of Long Island, of Donald Trump, came through Penny's arms as he held Neely in a death grip. It's not a coincidence that Neely was killed by an outsider — a New Yorker would know that sometimes, mentally unstable people yell on a subway. And I can't help but feel it wasn't a coincidence that he came from West Islip, New York.

AKIRA IKEZOE

WHO KILLED MARIA HERNANDEZ?

NEW EVIDENCE EMERGES THAT PROSECUTORS CUT CORNERS TO PUT AWAY AN INNOCENT MAN

By Theodore Hamm

The saga of the Central Park jogger and the exonerated five began that April. The murder of Yusuf Hawkins happened a few weeks later in Bensonhurst, just before the September Democratic primary for mayor. When community activist Maria Hernandez was gunned down in her Bushwick home in early August 1989, the violence sparked comparable outrage.

The story splashed across the tabloids, with the cover of the *Daily News* calling Maria a "Casualty of Drug War." Mayor Ed Koch and his Democratic challenger David Dinkins attended Hernandez's funeral, along with Curtis Sliwa and a phalanx of his fellow Guardian Angels.

So dramatic was the murder that even the staid *New York Times* editorial board joined in the outrage. In an entry titled "The Bushwick Terror," *The Times* declared, "[T]he drug terrorism that apparently took Maria Hernandez's life is the product of organized criminal activity. It is nothing less than an armed challenge to duly constituted authority, a challenge for anyone who would serve as mayor of New York City."

The NYPD initially searched for three suspects, believing the murder had been committed by local drug dealers angry that Maria and her husband Carlos Hernandez had been clearing their Starr Street block of heroin and crack. In September, while Dinkins toppled Koch in the Democratic primary, cops arrested two men for Maria's murder. Although Carlos Hernandez endorsed Republican Rudy Giuliani in the November election, Dinkins prevailed. Just before leaving office at the end of the year, Koch signed a City Council bill renaming Knickerbocker Park in honor of Maria Hernandez.

In early 1991, the Brooklyn DA's office — then under Charles "Joe" Hynes, first elected in 1989 — won two convictions for the Hernandez murder. In separate trials, prosecutor Marianne Crosley persuaded two different juries that Willie Figueroa and Harry Santiago fired at the Hernandez home in an early morning drive-by shooting, with a bullet fatally striking Maria as she dressed for work.

More than three decades later, Figueroa, 62, remains incarcerated, with over a decade to go before his first appearance before the parole board. Last summer, Santiago got out on parole. Both defendants have long maintained their innocence. An *Indypendent* review of their trials bolsters their claims — and calls into question the role played by Carlos Hernandez in the case.

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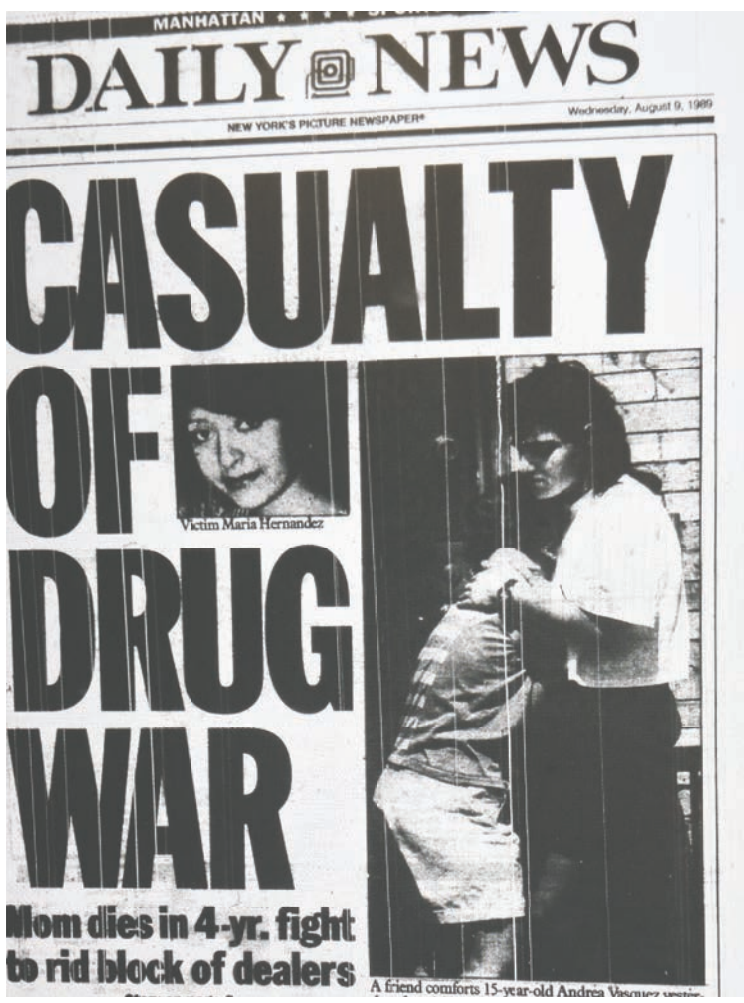

MANHATTAN

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

Wednesday, August 9, 1989

CASUALTY OF DRUG WAR

Victim Maria Hernandez

Mom dies in 4-yr. fight to rid block of dealers

A friend comforts 15-year-old Andrea Vasquez

There is no dispute that Figueroa and Santiago were dealing drugs in the summer of 1989. They were by no means the only ones doing so in Bushwick, however. Articles in the tabloids described the blocks around Knickerbocker Park as an open-air drug market. Figueroa's street name was "Willie Bundles," a moniker he acquired because of the small bags of heroin he dealt. Upon Figueroa's arrest, his Greenpoint-based father told the *New York Post* that his son had a crack habit, but that he and Willie were in Springfield, Mass., at the time of the slaying.

In mid-September 1989, five weeks after the Hernandez murder, cops charged Figueroa after a lengthy interrogation in which he made an incriminating statement on videotape. A crowd of 250 Bushwick residents surrounded the 83rd Precinct for the perp walk. When a *Post* reporter at the scene asked if he had killed Hernandez, Figueroa replied, "No."

To this day, Figueroa maintains that his statement to detectives was coerced. In it, he claims to have fired a .357 Magnum twice into the Hernandez home, adding that Santiago paid him to do so.

At the time of Figueroa's arrest, Hernandez told reporters that Figueroa was one of the many area drug dealers that he had battled with. According to Hernandez, Figueroa had swung a golf club at him one year earlier. "I always knew they were capable of carrying out [their] threats," Hernandez stated regarding Figueroa and his purported accomplices.

Figueroa, however, makes a starkly different claim. "I did not have any contact with Carlos Hernandez at all. Ever!" Figueroa recently told *The Indy*. At the 1991 trial, Hernandez was the key witness who testified against Figueroa.

At the outset of the murder investigation, the commanding officer from the NYPD's Brooklyn North division explained to reporters that Carlos Hernandez was "a street activist, very prominent and active in providing the department with narcotics information." During Figueroa's trial, defense attorney Mark Pliskow brought up a news story that focused on Hernandez's relationship with the 83rd Precinct.

Two weeks after his wife's slaying, Carlos Hernandez had become a national figure, making the rounds on the TV talk-show circuit, appearing on the influential Larry King show on CNN. As reported by *Newsday*, Hernandez was angered by the rumor circulating back in Bushwick that he was involved in drug dealing and offered to take a lie-detector test. The "street talk," a police source told *Newsday*, was that he "over the past couple years either sold drugs himself or favored certain dealers."

On the witness stand, Hernandez denied that he was involved in the drug trade. Figueroa later testified, insisting that he was in Springfield at the time of the murder and that detectives had forced him into confessing. After the verdict, a juror told a *Daily News* reporter that Figueroa's videotaped statement was the main reason the jury deemed him guilty. Upon leaving court, members of the Hernandez family joined Assistant DA Marianne Crosley for a champagne celebration.

■ ■ ■

Soon thereafter, Crosley brought Santiago to trial in front of the same judge, Francis X. Egitto. Figueroa only recently discovered that Crosley relied on different detectives and ballistics experts in the two trials. In Figueroa's case, the prosecutor's theory was that he had killed Hernandez with a .357 Magnum.

Continued on page 14

ROOTS: *The entrance to Maria Hernandez Park in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The park was renamed for the neighborhood anti-drug activist after her 1989 murder.*

FRONT PAGE: *Back when the* Daily News *had more than a million readers per day.*

‘PEOPLE ARE SPEAKING IN WHISPERS’

STUDENT SUSPENSIONS, FACULTY PURGES AND AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING SURVEILLANCE STATE HAVE BECOME THE NORM AS COLUMBIA FALLS SILENT AFTER LAST SPRING’S ANTI-GENOCIDE PROTESTS

By Amba Guerguerian

On Jan. 19, 2024, Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) led a protest of around 100 people on the steps of Columbia’s Low Library. They demanded the university divest from and disclose its financial ties to Israel and companies that do business with Israel and reform campus policing. Pro-Israel students held a counterprotest.

The counterprotesters were being “very belligerent this time around. That stood out to me,” said Zainab Khan, one of the students who participated in the CUAD protest.

“All of us started to notice this horrible stench while we were marching around,” said Catherine Curran-Groome, another student protester. “I remember thinking, ‘Did they just put down manure? What is going on?’ It wasn’t until we all got home later that evening and a bunch of us were like, ‘Wait, it still reeks,’” that the students began to wonder if the odor was something nefarious.

Protesters say the smell clung on to their bodies, clothes and even the sheets they slept in after multiple washes. “I tried vinegar, bleach, Dawn dish soap, plain laundry detergent, and I just could not get rid of the smell,” said Layla Saliba, another student who was at the protest. “I was in the shower just scrubbing myself for hours and could not get rid of it.”

In April, video footage of the protest appeared in a short Al Jazeera documentary showing two students, both former Israeli soldiers disguised in kuffiyehs, spraying a substance out of a small bottle among the pro-Palestine protesters.

The events that followed, including the sacking of a tenured law school professor who denounced the spray attack and a legal settlement that awarded nearly $400,000 to one of the attack’s perpetrators, embody the transformation of Columbia into a space that increasingly resembles the apartheid state in Israel that pro-Palestine students have been challenging.

“You’ve already created two classes of citizens in Israel, and now you’re creating two classes on college campuses,” says Steven Rohde, retired civil rights and liberties lawyer specializing in the First Amendment and a member of Bend the Arc, a Jewish Partnership for Justice.

At least ten of the protesters ended up seeking medical care, with symptoms such as burning eyes, breathing problems, nausea, extreme fatigue and long-term vaginal bleeding.

Curran-Groome was admitted to the hospital twice within one week of the protest, first for breathing problems and then seven hours of vomiting. Curran-Groome’s diagnosis from Mount Sinai was “chemical exposure,” as shown in her medical records. “Both times, the doctors were a little skeptical of my story, and they ran all sorts of tests thinking it was the flu or COVID, or this, or that, and both times all the tests came out negative. So it was sort of by a process of elimination that they started to believe me.”

For months after the incident, Curran-Groome, Khan and two other women experienced long-term bleeding. “I went to urgent care because I was bleeding for two weeks nonstop after the skunking. I got my period two weeks earlier than I was supposed to, and then kept bleeding, really bad, cramps, really heavy,” said Khan. “This is the first time it ever happened where something threw it out of whack,” she continued, saying the doctors told her it was either chemical exposure or stress. “Never once before was my period disregulated because of stress,” said Khan, who ended up “bleeding for long periods” until April.

Khan’s City MD diagnosis paperwork states “exposure to potentially hazardous chemical” and “irregular periods.” In the Al Jazeera video, a Jewish participant of the CUAD action shares her medical paperwork from Mount Sinai. “I went in for severe eye pain, and the cause was chemical inhalation,” she tells Al Jazeera.

Saliba’s City MD medical records also indicate “exposure to potentially hazardous chemical,” “nausea,” “fatigue,” “headache” and eye “irritation.” She said, “The chronic pain that I dealt with with my endometriosis was really, really bad.” Saliba was diagnosed with PTSD after the incident: “I was scared to go on campus for a really long time. Still when I’m at the spot where we got sprayed with chemicals, it gives me anxiety. I had nightmares; I couldn’t sleep properly.”

The students thought they may have been sprayed with Skunk, a chemical weapon used by the Israeli Defense Forces predominantly to disperse crowds of Palestinian protesters.

Curran-Groome lived in the West Bank for five years before coming to Columbia for grad school to study Palestine in the fall of 2023. She experienced Skunk as an English teacher in a refugee camp in the West Bank a few years ago. “It was used on homes there. People would just have to throw out all of their furniture, because no amount of washing would be able to get the stench out of it, and it even seeps into the walls.”

Saliba, who is Palestinian American and lost 15 family members in the Gaza genocide, learned from speaking with Palestinians in the West Bank after the incident that Skunk is “designed to stick to any soft or porous surface, and it doesn’t take very much. You only need a few tiny particles of it.”

The affected students claim the university did very little to help them. They filed a public safety complaint and went to faculty seeking support. They visited Columbia Health, where Curran-Groome says the doctors took the aftermath of the chemical attack “very seriously” and that her doctor “was absolutely shocked that Columbia administration had not notified Columbia Health that this had happened.”

“I am a member of an institution that has a duty of care and responsibility towards its students. The university reneged on that responsibility. They knew who [the affected] students were, because the students would go to various offices on campus and complain about this and want help and seek medical attention, and nothing came of it,” Dr. X, a Barnard professor who has asked to remain anonymous for fear of reprisal told *The Indypendent*.

According to the students who were sprayed, Columbia did not communicate with them or release any statement regarding the event until, they point out, the day after an *Intercept* investigation was published on Jan. 22, 2024. The only recourse the university ever provided them, say the students, was to notify some of them after the attack occurred that there was a rack of clothing they could peruse for free, but by that time, they had already replaced their belongings that reeked after the protest.

The university did, however, suspend the two students who sprayed the chemical in May. But in October, it was announced that one of the students reached a settlement with the university for $395,000 for wrongful suspension. The lawsuit the student filed against Columbia in April claimed his act was “a harmless expression of his speech.” A Republican staff report by the House Committee on Education and the Workforce claimed, without providing supporting evidence, that it was not in fact military-grade Skunk spray but a “fart spray” purchased on Amazon that the students used on the crowd.

Curran-Groome says none of students who experienced side effects were ever contacted by the House investigators. “I’m not sure what kind of investigation only talks to people on one side,” she said.

The Indy contacted Columbia’s press office for comment on its investigation of the incident, and a university spokesperson referred us to a Columbia Public Safety update, which states, “We are writing to provide an update regarding a January 19, 2024, incident on campus: The ‘foul-smelling substance’ sprayed during a demonstration was not any biochemical weapon, illicit substance or personal protective spray. Rather, the substance sprayed was a non-toxic, legal, novelty item that can be purchased online and in stores throughout the country.” It does not provide any information about how that conclusion was reached.

According to Dr. X and another professor who provided an anonymous tip to *The Indy*, some faculty who inquired were “expressly told that samples were collected and those chemicals were being tested. Some will say it’s NYPD; some will say that there were independent samples also taken,” Dr. X said. “Why not make public the findings of what the chemicals were?”

Regardless, the professor says, “It no longer serves any purpose for us to call it Skunk spray, as it hasn’t been proven. Even if it is fart spray, it is demonstrably not harmless. You could buy a lot of things on Amazon, and if you use those things to do harm to your fellow students, then that is demonstrable harm.”

‘WE’RE FIGHTING OUR OWN ADMINISTRATION’

Curran-Groome was suspended in the spring for two years and had her over $120,000 scholarship revoked for organizing Gaza solidarity actions at Columbia — what she calls an “effective expulsion.” She, along with two other students, filed a Feb. 3 lawsuit against Columbia’s administration for wrongful suspensions repressing speech on campus. The students argue that they were targeted for their pro-Palestine views, that the university violated its disciplinary policies and that it also violated New York’s tenant laws when it evicted them from student housing.

In April 1968, hundreds of Columbia students took over several campus buildings to protest the university’s ties to the military amid the Vietnam War. Many of those protesters were beaten and arrested by the NYPD. In the 1980s, students engaged in civil disobedience to demand the university divest from companies with ties to apartheid South Africa, winning that struggle. Over time, Columbia would come to celebrate its activist history and promote itself to prospective students as a university that welcomed dissent. It began to betray that identity after Hamas’ bloody incursion into southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

On Oct. 9, 2023, after Israel had begun its non-stop bombardment of Gaza, around 20 student groups at Columbia released a statement extending condolences to Israelis and Palestinians who had experienced loss. It also called for an end to Israeli apartheid and condemned discrimination against Palestinians, urging Columbia to “stand against such discrimination.”

In April, Palestine Legal filed a Title VI discrimination complaint against the university on behalf of four students who have been the target of “extreme harassment” since Oct. 9, 2023, “including receiving multiple death threats.” It states that shortly after the publication of the student statement, Palestinian, pro-Palestine, Arab and Muslim students “began to get doxed by off-campus groups and fellow students.” In one instance, a doxing truck — paid for by the “right-wing, anti-Palestinian” group Accuracy in Media — circled Columbia’s campus with the photos and names of students alleged to be members of groups that released the statement.

Some faculty expressed concern to the administration about this smearing of students as antisemites. One of those professors, who we’ll call Dr. Y, spoke with *The Indy*, asking to remain anonymous for fear of retribution. “When we went to Columbia … they said, ‘We can’t do anything,’” the professor told *The Indy*. “And that’s exactly when we’re like, ‘Oh, we’re not just fighting some random guy outside with money. We’re fighting our own administration, which 100% regulates what’s happening on a public street all of the time.’”

Columbia also formed the Task Force on Antisemitism in November 2023 amid growing political pressure regarding criticism of Israel on campus. It is made up of three pro-Israel Jewish faculty members — Ester R. Fuchs, Nicholas Lemann and David M. Schizer — to the exclusion of the many Jewish faculty members that are critical of Israel. The task force has come out with two reports, “Columbia University’s Rules on Demonstrations” and “Columbia University Student Experiences of Antisemitism and Recomendations for Promoting Shared Values and Inclusion.” Its forthcoming report will be a curriculum review.

On Sept. 5, dozens of Jewish faculty members at Columbia University and Barnard College delivered a 10-page letter to Columbia’s administration in response to the task force’s second report. It states, “The Task Force equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism.” The letter-signers also criticized the report for “neglectful omissions of context and climate,” a research method “that conflates feelings with facts,” the use of “conveniently slippery definitions,” and sometimes “outright factual misrepresentations” of incidents or speech.

Joseph Howley, a professor of classics at Columbia who is Jewish and has spoken out against the university’s repression of pro-Palestine activism, says the creation of the Task Force on Antisemitism and “the way [the university] constituted the group seems to me to be very much in line with what the [Anti-Defamation League] had been demanding from universities and colleges across the country. And that’s before we even get to the way the rightwing MAGA folks, elected politicians who had systematically been targeting public universities for years, really figured out

Continued on next page

ERIC SANTOMAURO-STENZEL

ASH MARINACCIO

ASH MARINACCIO

STATELY: *The Columbia campus looking toward Low Memorial Library.*

BANNED: *Catherine Curran-Groome outside the Columbia campus, which she is no longer allowed to enter.*

PREPARING TO SERVE: *Layla Saliba is pursuing a masters in social work at Columbia.*

COLUMBIA

Continued from previous page

that this protest movement could be a viable wedge to help them expand their assault on private institutions of higher learning. So there's a kind of unholy marriage that took place last year."

"The kind of extreme pro-Israel, no-criticism-shall-be-tolerated movement in this country was very ready to try to shut down" pro-Palestine rhetoric at Columbia, says Howley. "They were very ready to exploit the trauma and the fear and the pain that a lot of American Jews felt after October 7th in ways that struck me as very cynical."

Howley points out that the Israeli government has been transparent about its targeting of U.S. universities "for years." In fact, in November 2023, Israel put together a task force to "carry out covert campaigns at U.S. universities," *Truthout* reported in March.

Also in November 2023, Columbia suspended two anti-Zionist student groups — Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) — and some of their members after they held an "unauthorized" walkout following other on-campus actions the university had not sanctioned. They have not yet been reinstated. "Banning" says Rohde, "is the ultimate form of censorship. To remove a group which otherwise would be holding teach-ins, rallies, protests, seminars and, where appropriate, classroom debates, etc. removes the information and the debate right away."

Despite the groups being barred, large numbers of students and faculty continued to protest the war on Gaza. Columbia University Apartheid Divest, a coalition of student groups that formed in 2016, became active again in October 2023 and moreso in November after the suspensions of JVP and SJP. In 2020, the group had passed a Columbia-College-wide referendum calling for the university to divest from Israel that was overturned by then-University President Lee Bollinger. (Things have since changed. In October, groups began to disaffiliate from CUAD and established the Columbia Palestine Solidarity Coalition. Some of them published an op-ed in *Columbia Daily Spectator* that read, "We regret that CUAD has shifted from a horizontally structured coalition founded on Palestinian liberation to a nebulous organization that is not led by the affinity group of Palestinian student organizers.")

"I think pro-Israel faculty and organizations were shocked at the number of pro-Palestine students, shocked at the diversity of that group and the numbers and how overwhelming those numbers were in comparison to the Zionist numbers," Dr. Z, a professor at Columbia's Morningside Heights campus who wishes to remain anonymous told *The Indy*.

THE SCHOOL OF GENERAL STUDIES

Columbia's School of General Studies, an undergraduate college for non-traditional students, started a dual-degree program with Tel Aviv University in 2019 (most Palestinians, denied the right to return to Israel, cannot participate in this program). In addition to providing mentoring services to U.S. veterans, General Studies does so for Israeli veterans. The college's current student body president, Maya Platek, was a spokesperson for the IDF prior to enrolling at Columbia.

At the General Studies gala in the spring, eight students say they were harassed for wearing kuffiyehs. One Arab student reported being called *sharmouta*, which means "bitch" in Hebrew and Arabic, by an Israeli student. In a video viewed by *The Indy*, a student rips the kuffieyeh out of the hands of a pro-Palestine student and then pushes her. In a document that was sent to the administration and viewed by *The Indy*, the eight students outlined the forms of harassment they faced from Israeli students, which also included one of them being punched and kicked. To their knowledge, nothing ever came of the discrimination complaints they filed, in which they also requested the university review the venue's surveillance footage from that night, as only one of the incidents was caught on video.

AFTERMATH: *Medical records for three Columbia students – Catherine Curran-Groome, Layla Saliba and Zainab Khan – who sought care after being sprayed at a campus pro-Palestine protest by two Israeli students.*

The university responded with a much greater sense of urgency after another incident last spring at an alumni mixer for General Studies students. In this case, the accused was an Arab student who tried to approach Lisa Rosen-Metch, the dean of General Studies, twice at the mixer but was thwarted by other students who said Rosen-Metch didn't want to speak with them. The student, who spoke to *The Indy* on the condition of anonymity, said they were hit with a harassment complaint that resulted in a warning. The student filed a discrimination report the day after the incident. They told *The Indy* they felt dumbfounded and "overwhelmingly discriminated against."

Meanwhile, Saliba has received several conduct reports since last fall. She says in the spring semester, a lawyer from Debevoise and Plimpton, a law firm that has represented the Sackler family, interrogated her during one of her disciplinary hearings and that the university misrepresented the lawyer as a Columbia employee. She has been told by the university she cannot involve her own lawyer in disciplinary processes.

In the most recent conduct report she received, Saliba says she was found guilty by association, because she didn't author the *Columbia Spectator* article or Instagram posts of concern in the report. One of the Instagram posts has a slide titled "The Right to Resist and Return" and another outlines Columbia Palestine Solidarity Coalition's divestment demands. Saliba also says pro-Israel Professor Shai Davidai continues to harass her online while he is being investigated after she filed a harassment complaint against him for doing just that.

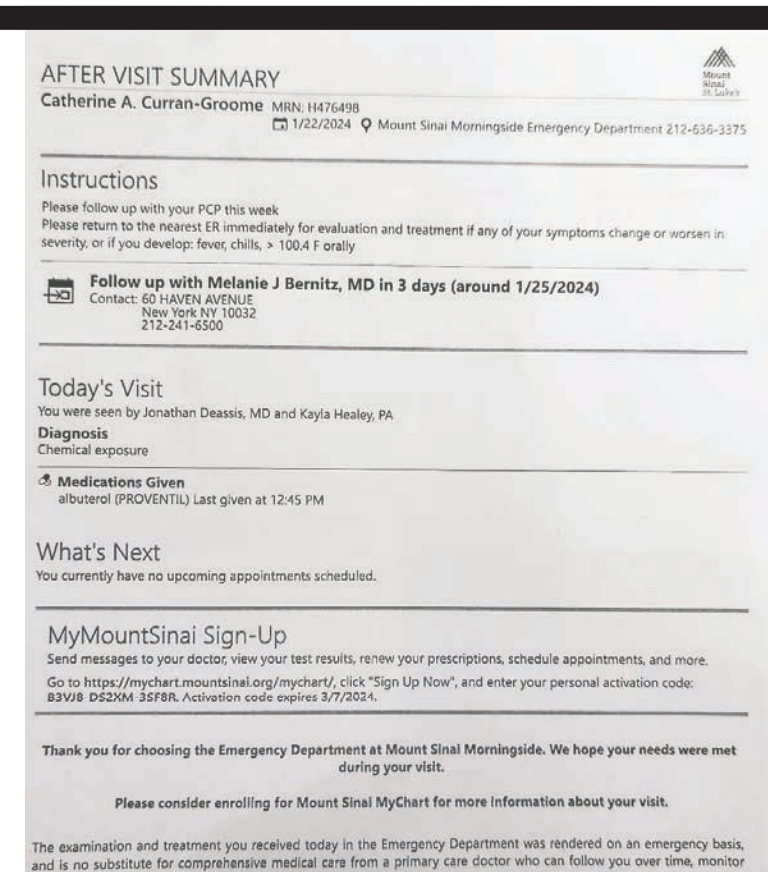
"What the school has done is created a two-tier system of justice," says Saliba. "If you are a Zionist, you can get away with pretty much anything. But if you are a Palestinian or you support Palestine, you are held under a microscope. Anything you say or do, you can get in trouble for."

A SILENCED CAMPUS

While the fall 2023 and spring 2024 semesters at Columbia were marked by protest and debate, the campus has since become much quieter. Students and faculty speak out less, and when they do, they often face disciplinary action. An anonymous General Studies student says, "I definitely feel like less people are speaking out because … now you've seen what the consequences look like when you engage in pro-Palestine speech … so it discourages people from fucking around and finding out."

Katherine Franke, a well-known Columbia Law

Continued on page 14



AFTER VISIT SUMMARY

Catherine A. Curran-Groome MRN: H476498

1/22/2024 Mount Sinai Morningside Emergency Department 212-636-3375

Instructions

Please follow up with your PCP this week
Please return to the nearest ER immediately for evaluation and treatment if any of your symptoms change or worsen in severity, or if you develop: fever, chills, > 100.4 F orally

Follow up with Melanie J Bernitz, MD in 3 days (around 1/25/2024)
Contact: 60 HAVEN AVENUE
New York NY 10032
212-241-6500

Today's Visit

You were seen by Jonathan Deassis, MD and Kayla Healey, PA

Diagnosis
Chemical exposure

Medications Given
albuterol (PROVENTIL) Last given at 12:45 PM

What's Next

You currently have no upcoming appointments scheduled.

MyMountSinai Sign-Up

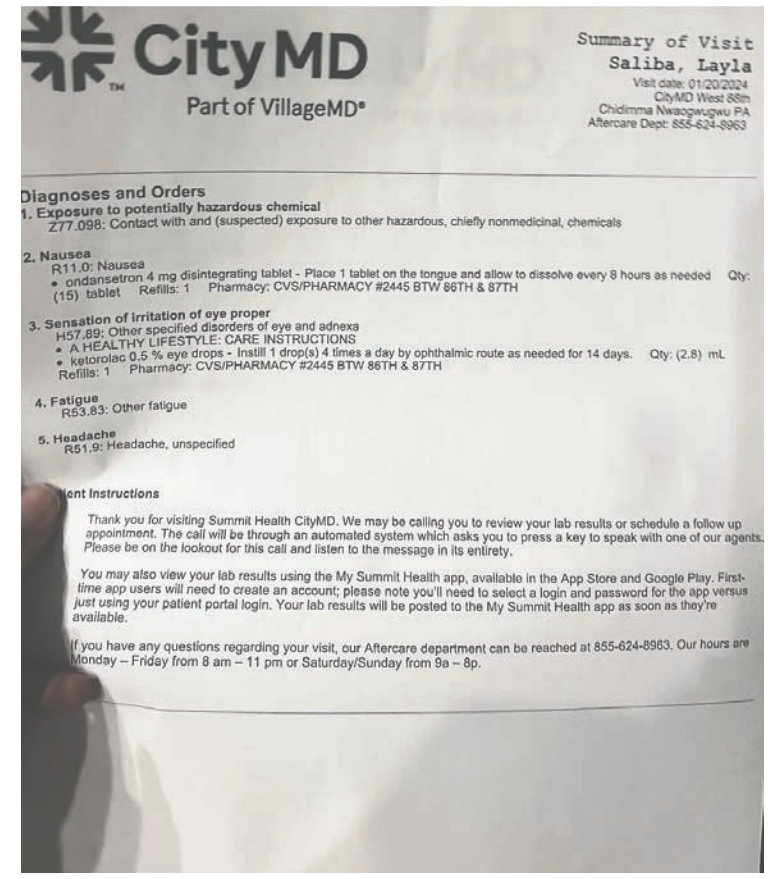
Send messages to your doctor, view your test results, renew your prescriptions, schedule appointments, and more.

Go to https://mychart.mountsinai.org/mychart/, click "Sign Up Now", and enter your personal activation code: B3VJ8-DS2XM-3SF8R. Activation code expires 3/7/2024.

Thank you for choosing the Emergency Department at Mount Sinai Morningside. We hope your needs were met during your visit.

Please consider enrolling for Mount Sinai MyChart for more information about your visit.

The examination and treatment you received today in the Emergency Department was rendered on an emergency basis, and is no substitute for comprehensive medical care from a primary care doctor who can follow you over time, monitor



CityMD
Part of VillageMD

Summary of Visit
Saliba, Layla
Visit date: 01/20/2024
CityMD West 86th
Chidimma Nwaogwugwu PA
Aftercare Dept: 855-624-8963

Diagnoses and Orders

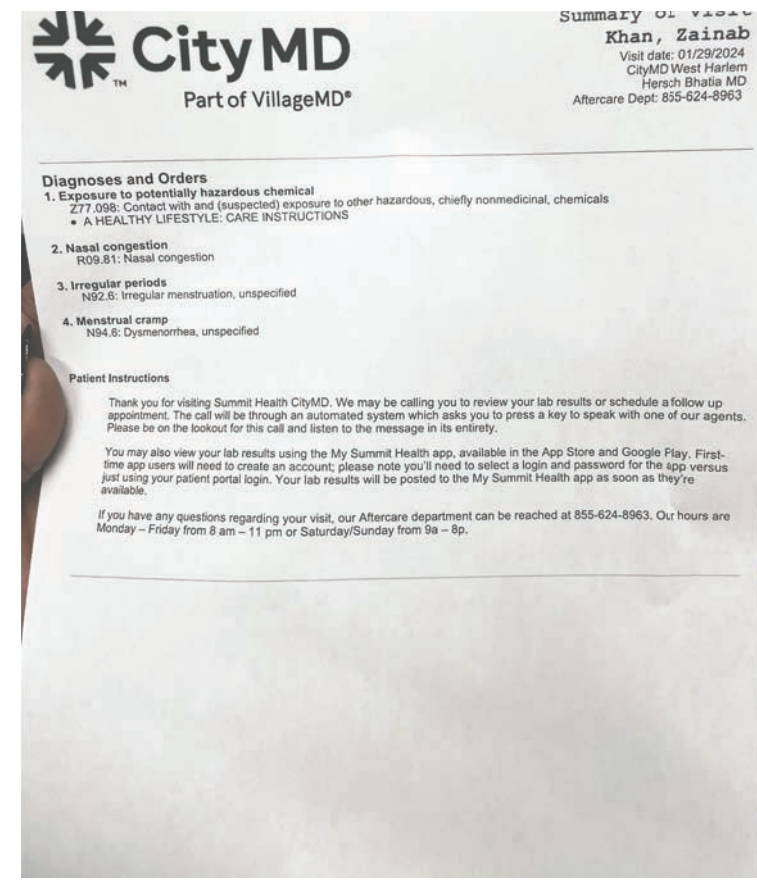
1. **Exposure to potentially hazardous chemical**
   Z77.098: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to other hazardous, chiefly nonmedicinal, chemicals
2. **Nausea**
   R11.0: Nausea
   • ondansetron 4 mg disintegrating tablet - Place 1 tablet on the tongue and allow to dissolve every 8 hours as needed Qty: (15) tablet Refills: 1 Pharmacy: CVS/PHARMACY #2445 BTW 86TH & 87TH
3. **Sensation of irritation of eye proper**
   H57.89: Other specified disorders of eye and adnexa
   • A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: CARE INSTRUCTIONS
   • ketorolac 0.5 % eye drops - Instill 1 drop(s) 4 times a day by ophthalmic route as needed for 14 days. Qty: (2.8) mL Refills: 1 Pharmacy: CVS/PHARMACY #2445 BTW 86TH & 87TH
4. **Fatigue**
   R53.83: Other fatigue
5. **Headache**
   R51.9: Headache, unspecified

Patient Instructions

Thank you for visiting Summit Health CityMD. We may be calling you to review your lab results or schedule a follow up appointment. The call will be through an automated system which asks you to press a key to speak with one of our agents. Please be on the lookout for this call and listen to the message in its entirety.

You may also view your lab results using the My Summit Health app, available in the App Store and Google Play. First-time app users will need to create an account; please note you'll need to select a login and password for the app versus just using your patient portal login. Your lab results will be posted to the My Summit Health app as soon as they're available.

If you have any questions regarding your visit, our Aftercare department can be reached at 855-624-8963. Our hours are Monday – Friday from 8 am – 11 pm or Saturday/Sunday from 9a – 8p.



CityMD
Part of VillageMD

Summary of Visit
Khan, Zainab
Visit date: 01/29/2024
CityMD West Harlem
Hersch Bhatia MD
Aftercare Dept: 855-624-8963

Diagnoses and Orders

1. **Exposure to potentially hazardous chemical**
   Z77.098: Contact with and (suspected) exposure to other hazardous, chiefly nonmedicinal, chemicals
   • A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: CARE INSTRUCTIONS
2. **Nasal congestion**
   R09.81: Nasal congestion
3. **Irregular periods**
   N92.6: Irregular menstruation, unspecified
4. **Menstrual cramp**
   N94.6: Dysmenorrhea, unspecified

Patient Instructions

Thank you for visiting Summit Health CityMD. We may be calling you to review your lab results or schedule a follow up appointment. The call will be through an automated system which asks you to press a key to speak with one of our agents. Please be on the lookout for this call and listen to the message in its entirety.

You may also view your lab results using the My Summit Health app, available in the App Store and Google Play. First-time app users will need to create an account; please note you'll need to select a login and password for the app versus just using your patient portal login. Your lab results will be posted to the My Summit Health app as soon as they're available.

If you have any questions regarding your visit, our Aftercare department can be reached at 855-624-8963. Our hours are Monday – Friday from 8 am – 11 pm or Saturday/Sunday from 9a – 8p.

Caregiver Sought

Are you ***over*** the clinical atmosphere of traditional nursing homes? Are you ***tired*** of being overworked and having an insane patient load? Do you want to get back your passion in compassion? If you're reliable and have a positive attitude, then you may be a good fit to take care of my beautiful mother.

Schedule: 5 days a week and 5 hours per day.
Salary: $30/hr.
To apply: email Ronnie at rknighitx2@gmail.com for more info.

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388 Atlantic Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11217

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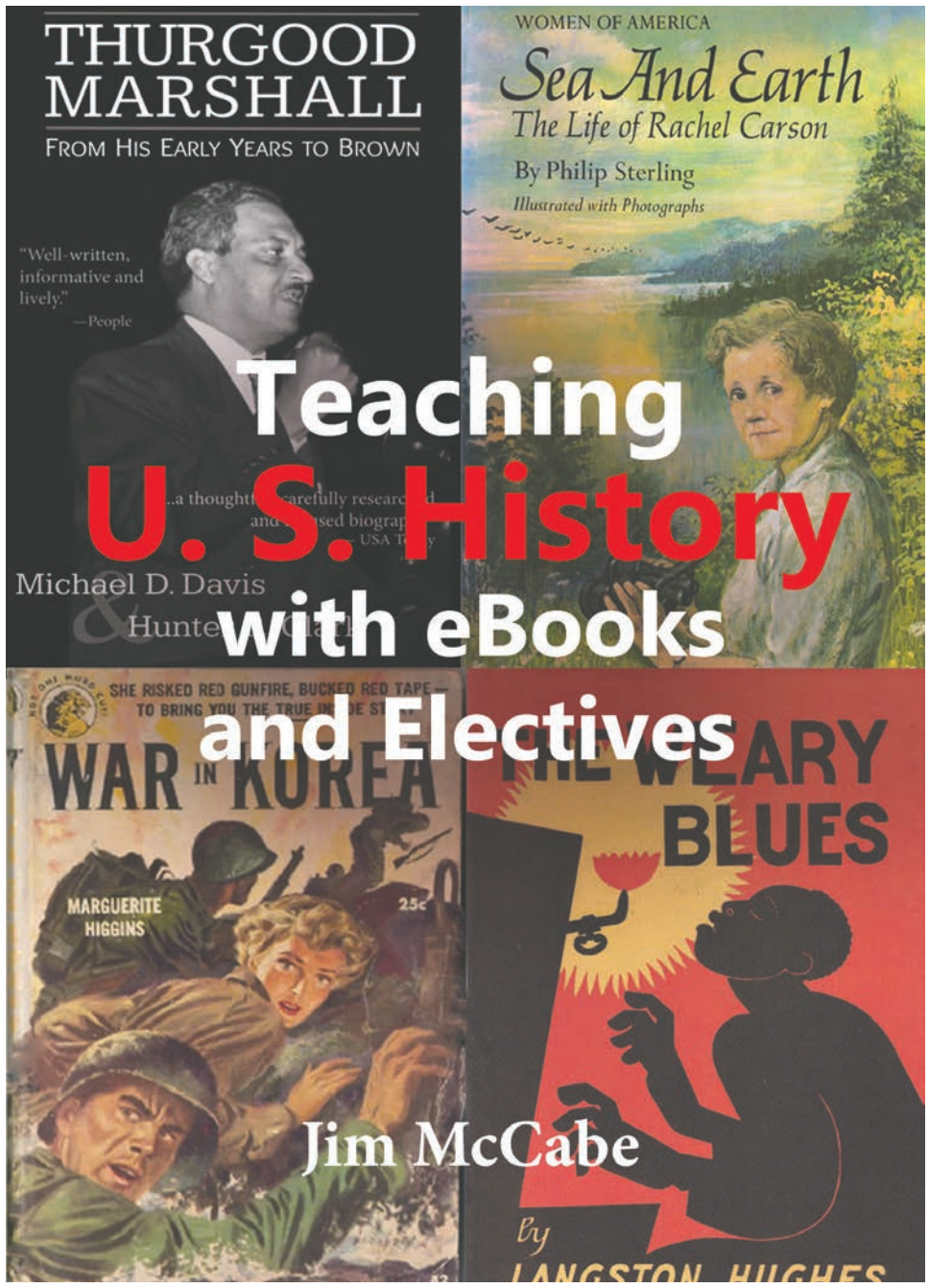

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Jim McCabe

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MARIA HERNANDEZ

Continued from page 9

But according to Figueroa's current court filing, the .357 was then ruled out as the murder weapon in the Santiago trial. Crosley's revised theory required new law-enforcement witnesses so that they would not contradict previous testimony. Judge Egitto evidently looked the other way.

In both trials, Crosley told the jury that the defendants had committed the shooting while driving by the Hernandez home at 105 Starr St. in Santiago's red Camaro just after 4:30 in the morning. In the second trial, two mechanics testified that the broken-down Camaro was in their shop at the time of the murder. No witnesses or physical evidence linked Figueroa to the vehicle.

Among the many pieces of information that Figueroa has received amid his challenges to his conviction are two reports (known as DD-5s) from Detective Frank O'Keeffe of the 83rd Precinct. The DD-5s from early on in the investigation provide the name of a rival drug dealer who had turf disputes with both Carlos Hernandez and Harry Santiago. The reports state the dealer then paid another named person to shoot at the Hernandez residence.

According to Figueroa, Assistant DA Crosley did not turn over the DD-5s to the defense at the time of trial. Detective O'Keeffe tells *The Indy* he does not recall the specific details of his reports. Like Judge Egitto, Mark Pliskow, Figueroa's trial counsel, is now deceased.

Despite winning the high-profile convictions, Crosley left the Brooklyn DA's office later in 1991. She has since relocated to the Cleveland area. Reached by email, Crosley initially agreed to field *The Indy*'s inquiry about the cases. Crosley then did not answer a set of questions focused on Carlos Hernandez's work with the 83rd Precinct, her reliance on different ballistics experts, or whether she stands by the convictions of Figueroa and Santiago.

Over the past few years, Figueroa has asked the Brooklyn DA's Conviction Review Unit (CRU) to open an investigation of his case but has not received any updates. His current court challenge is a long shot, given that the judge handling it, Matthew D'Emic, already rejected Figueroa's previous motion.

On most nights at Eastern Correctional Facility near Ellenville, N.Y., Willie Figueroa can be found in the law library, helping his peers research their cases while working on his own. A baseball enthusiast, Figueroa hopes that one day in the not-distant future, he'll be sitting at Yankee Stadium watching a ball game.

COLUMBIA

Continued from page 12

School professor who has been vocal about her support for Palestinian rights, was forced to resign in January. A pressure campaign against her was launched after she criticized the behavior of the Israeli students who sprayed the chemical on protesters last year and questioned the university's student exchange program with Israel in a Jan. 25, 2024, interview on *Democracy Now!*. Franke wrote an open letter after making the decision to step down, stating, "Upon reflection, it became clear to me that Columbia had become such a hostile environment, that I could no longer serve as an active member of the faculty." She detailed various forms of harassment:

> *"Over the last year I have had several people posing as students come to my office to seek my advice about student protests while they were secretly videotaping me and then edited versions of those recordings were published on right-wing social media sites. … I received several death threats at my home. I regularly receive emails that express the hope that I am raped, murdered, and otherwise assaulted on account of my support of Palestinian rights. I have had law school colleagues follow me from the subway to my office in the law school, yelling at me in front of students that I am a Hamas-supporter and accusing me of supporting violence against Israeli women and children. Colleagues in the law school have videotaped me without my consent and then shared it with right-wing organizations outside the law school. And I have had students enroll in my classes with the primary purpose of creating situations in which they can provoke discussions that they can record, post online, and then use to file complaints against me with the university."*

"There's a whole ecosystem of law firms, alums, current professors, trustees and the antisemitism task force that seem to all be working hand-in-hand in some way to fundamentally reshape the university," says Dr. Z.

Over 200 students, some of whom are Jewish, will soon receive the results of recent disciplinary hearings for their participation in the three Gaza solidarity encampments at the university in the spring; at least five staff members have been fired since the spring semester; half a dozen cases are currently churning against faculty, says a source familiar with the subject; 116th Street, a public street that runs through campus, has been closed off to all but Columbia ID holders; facial recognition is being used to target pro-Palestine students; professors are updating their syllabi to state they can't be filmed in class; and students are facing disciplinary action as a result of complaints filed against them for pro-Palestine social media posts.

The university can bring charges of violations of rules of conduct against students, faculty and staff. Also, various types of complaints can be filed against faculty and students. While those against faculty can originate from inside or outside of the university, some types against students — but not those claiming discrimination — can only be filed by people within the university. The pro-Palestine people who are targeted by these complaints also often face harassment and doxing from external sites, such as Canary Mission, Documenting Jew Hatred on Campus, and Jew Hate Database, to name a few.

"There is a huge online mechanism of doxing, highlighting and complaining against [students and faculty]," says Dr. X. "We don't know if they're originating outside or they're being amplified outside, but there's certainly many, many external websites. Some of them claim to be affiliated. They claim to be alumni. Some of them just generally claim to be watchdogs."

"It's pretty clear that there are people who are still upset about Palestine solidarity protests last year and still want to see some consequences or punishment for stuff they didn't like," says Professor Howley. "And it's pretty clear there are politicians who are still eager for any way to apply pressure or do damage to universities and are happy to use the idea of rampant rule breaking or insufficient discipline as a blunt instrument. This kind of alliance was a toxic mix a year ago, and it's going to remain a dangerous climate for higher education for the foreseeable future."

The Indy asked Columbia to respond to allegations of a repressive campus climate, and it declined to respond.

DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

Columbia University has taken many steps to suppress criticism of Israel and make pro-Israel Jewish students feel more comfortable since the fall of 2023. Among those, it set up the antisemitism task force; cracked down on events and demonstrations critical of Israel; changed its protest and event policies; and on several occasions, changed its means of interrogating and disciplining students, backpedaling somewhat over the summer under pressure from the university senate. Columbia has not, however, taken such action to support pro-Palestine, Arab and Muslim students who face harassment.

Columbia's Task Force on Antisemitism did not define antisemitism after releasing its first report, but in the second report, it defined it as "prejudice, discrimination, hate, or violence directed at Jews, including Jewish Israelis. Antisemitism can manifest in a range of ways, including as ethnic slurs, epithets, and caricatures; stereotypes; antisemitic tropes and symbols; Holocaust denial; targeting Jews or Israelis for violence or celebrating violence against them; exclusion or discrimination based on Jewish identity or ancestry or real or perceived ties to Israel; and certain double standards applied to Israel."

Professor Howley says he doesn't see a prevailing climate of antisemitism on campus, but that he is aware of instances of anti-Jewish harassment, and that antisemitism is made more common by the fact that Israel says its oppression of Palestinians is carried out "in the name of Jewish safety" and that "Israeli soldiers are wrapped in our holiest symbols."

"If you are pro-Israel, if you are trying to defend the Netanyahu government and its policies, and you are confronted with objective facts like the number of innocent Palestinians who've been killed, the devastation of college and schools, the devastation and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and the litany could go on — what do you say to defend Israel?" says Rohde. "One of the answers is, you demean, undermine and delegitimize the critics of Israel. And when you do that, the easiest weapon at hand is to call them antisemites."

The false equivalence that has been created between criticism of the state of Israel and antisemitism has created an atmosphere of self censorship at Columbia and other universities that have been similarly targeted, says Dr. Y.

"The easiest way to think about what has happened since November [2023] is that Columbia has been on a lockdown on speech, movement, protests. We are swiping in to our individual buildings, swiping in to the campus. Normal things like access to library for alumni, for visiting scholars, for people who live in the city, were shut down," said the professor. "The culture on campus is sort of like a post-traumatic zone where people are speaking in whispers. I taught a class that I was teaching in the fall of 2023 again this past fall, and it's remarkable how quiet the students have become as a result of whatever has happened on campus — quiet in the sense they aren't able to express themselves, talk about texts in the right way, fully, without fear of surveillance."

HOW THE INDIE AMAZON LABOR DOCUMENTARY *UNION* SELF-DISTRIBUTED

Union
Directed by Brett Story & Stephen Maing
2024, 100 min

By Nicky Yeager

Union is a gripping, sharp and artful documentary following the ragtag group of organizers who unionized the first Amazon warehouse, JFK8 in Staten Island, in 2022. Since premiering at Sundance last year, the documentary has played at around 100 film festivals, has won or been nominated for 16 awards, was included on this year's Oscars shortlist, and was named on best-of-the-year lists in *The New York Times* and *New York Magazine*.

With all this buzz, why hasn't a distributor picked it up? Despite the film's critical acclaim, it has yet to secure a distribution deal on a major streaming platform. The filmmakers behind *Union*, who produced, shot and edited the film independently, are — not unlike the Amazon worker-organizers gracing their frames — scrappy, dogged and up against a huge machine. Once self-releasing emerged as the only option, *Union*'s production team decided to roll out its own distribution plan last fall. *The Indypendent* sat down with co-producer Mars Verrone to talk about how they did that and more.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

THE INDYPENDENT: Can you describe how distribution is supposed to work for documentaries?

MARS VERRONE: The dream scenario of what happens, which almost never happens, is: you get into a major festival like Sundance, you premiere, and then, if you haven't already sold your film, you get the attention of buyers, and offers for distribution deals come your way. A few years ago, independent documentaries were being picked up by streamers for millions of dollars out of film festivals. I think that was just an anomalous moment, and that bubble has totally burst. Now, if you're lucky enough to get a distribution deal, the sale is significantly smaller. But more and more indie documentarians are struggling to get any kind of distribution.

I also can't help but mention that Amazon recently buying a Melania Trump vanity documentary for $40 million. We're experiencing a real whiplash effect in the film industry that is directly tied to politics.

Why do you think* Union *has not been picked up?

I think with any political film, it's really hard. Buyers and distributors gave us a mixed bag of responses during the making of the film. Some people said, "Oh, this is an amazing project. It's a no-brainer. Of course you'll get [a distribution deal], easy." Other people said, "you're totally crazy. No one will ever buy this."

Where was that cynicism coming from?

I think that was about the specificity of Amazon. Some people like to theorize that Amazon is censoring this film behind the scenes. While I don't know if that's true, the ubiquity of Amazon in the tech and media spheres is certainly part of the reason we didn't receive distribution offers from major players. Every big streaming platform is hosted on Amazon Web Services or is somehow in business with Amazon. Amazon was a major sponsor of many pitch markets we participated in as well as the Sundance Film Festival, where we premiered.

Most, if not all of these major distributors have engaged in union-busting activity. For how popular unions are among the public, with historically high bipartisan approval ratings, I suspect there was still hesitancy around labor organizing as our subject matter.

Because of all of this, we had a healthy skepticism of not expecting to get a big sale out of Sundance, so in the months prior we started mentally and somewhat logistically preparing to distribute it ourselves.

Tell me about self-distribution.

SIMON LEUTHI

Self-distribution basically means playing a film in movie theaters, making it available to rent and stream online, getting it into schools and libraries, and doing all the work to market and promote it yourself. Usually, you have a big company working on all these things. We had a team of less than 20 people!

We tried to connect every part of our distribution with labor-movement activity. When we put the film in theaters, we played in 20 different cities and tried to have post-screening panels platforming, ideally, Amazon workers, but if not, local union representatives and organizers who could speak to how to support labor efforts locally.

For the online rental release, we used a "pay it forward" feature. When people rented the film, they could also donate so an Amazon worker could watch it for free. We also set up an affiliate rental link system with labor-movement partners, like Jobs with Justice, SEIU, EWOC, Hip Hop Caucus, the Labor Force and more. If you rented the film using the SEIU link, SEIU would receive 25% of that rental sale.

How have you collaborated with workers and organizers in the distribution phase?

We've had a lot of cool screenings followed by Q&As with Amazon Labor Union workers who are in the film. We did one in North Carolina with an independent union called CAUSE that actually now has an upcoming union election at their [Amazon] warehouse. We had two ALU organizers from Staten Island join. It was an incredible thing to have workers from across the country just be able to talk shop about organizing.

I think for the ALU organizers, the documentary is helpful as a device for self reflection. None of them see the film as, "Here's the blueprint for how you organize Amazon." It's about the nitty gritty of group dynamics and organizing. It can be a tool in the sense that: "This was an experiment; this was imperfect, but we can use this to learn and build a stronger labor movement."

The film industry's market consolidation has been getting worse for a long time and is likely to accelerate under Trump. Tell me about how you see independent media in this moment.

Labor organizing is going to be under assault under the Trump administration, and independent media making will become much more challenging. Cutting things like public media and arts funding is a stated part of this administration's agenda. When the opportunities are closing in this much, we should force something new to emerge. And given how bad things are now, we actually don't want to continue with business as usual. We don't want to go back to the old ways. There is now an opening to create a radically different media landscape — one where independent cinema can flourish, leftist politics can be platformed and film workers can sustain themselves.

People are already so starved for quality films and principled political content. There's a proven audience for independent cinema, and if the only type of thing Netflix offers is the Jake Paul-Mike Tyson fight and films that are made to be played in the background while you look at your phone, that's going to create a situation where people have to go somewhere else for their media. Audiences more and more are feeling like, "This sucks." Vast audiences have abandoned these subscription-based platforms altogether to watch more accessible content on YouTube, Twitch and social media.

Audiences and filmmakers are both unhappy. We're going to have to figure out how to make independent media, sustain ourselves in this work and reach people. It'll be very hard to do, but rather than filmmakers asking, "How do I get my film on Netflix?" the question is becoming "Who is my audience, and how do I reach them?" None of that is figured out, but I have optimism for what it will generate. I think perspectives are shifting and energy is being directed in new places.

BUILD YOUR AUDIENCE: *Mars Verrone is the co-producer of an award-winning documentary film on the first-ever successful campaign to unionize an Amazon warehouse.*

HEALING THE HOOD

THE BLACK PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION IS COMING TO A COMMUNITY NEAR YOU

By Nicholas Powers

You are reading the future. The story in your hands in an excerpt from Black Psychedelic Revolution, *published by North Atlantic Books. It imagines psychedelics like MDMA, magic mushrooms and LSD used by New York's working class and poor to heal from long standing trauma and get free.*

Chris Rock and Will Smith cut a red ribbon tied to a freshly painted building. The awning says The People's Psychedelic Therapy Center. Camera flashes create a strobe-light effect.

Rock gestures to the staff. "Thanks to the Mental Health Infrastructure Act of 2029." He points at the building. "Who knew that MDMA can heal the hood?"

Smith ties an arm around Rock. "Millions saw Chris and I undergo our psychedelic healing in the HBO special 'The Slap Heard Round the World.' If we can do it, you can do it!"

Rock leans in.

"I thought Will was on ayahuasca when he hit me." He side-eyes Smith. "When he said let's do LSD, I was like, haven't you done enough drugs? I still can't hear out this ear." The staff giggles. "We're friends again. Who knows where a punch can land?"

Rock play-jabs Smith and accidentally hits his chin. Smith's head snaps. He blinks tears.

"You okay?" Rock theatrically squints. Smith raises his palms up.

"Waited years for that," Rock says.

■ ■ ■

Dr. Iwosan strides down the hall, heels like a clock's tic-toc. She peeks into the rooms and sees a therapist spray lavender mist on a cornrowed Black man on MDMA. He smiles. In another room, a therapist cradles a weeping Dominican boy. Iwosan leans on the door. Good. Good. Release that shit.

Sitting in the office is a tight-lipped young sistah. Baby-faced and tense, she obsessively scrolls her cell phone.

"Keisha."

No response. Stone.

Iwosan leans back on her desk, pulls her dreadlocks back and sighs. She read the girl's file — 13 years old; brother shot dead nine months ago; gang related — classic PTSD symptoms. Lil' Iron Chef here just razor-slashed a girl at school. It's either this or juvie.

"Keisha, do you want to be here?"

"Sure." A Megan Thee Stallion video reflects from the cell phone onto her pupils. "Free drugs."

Iwosan sidesteps Keisha and opens the door.

"Yo, you kickin' me out?" Keisha snarled. Iwosan lifts her shirt to reveal a dark scar. "At 14, I was shot." She shakes her head. "I survived the bullet but died in here." She taps her heart. "Did drugs. Did the streets. Did every mistake you are about to. Come back when you want help."

Keisha sucks her teeth and leaves.

■ ■ ■

Across America, psychedelic healing centers open in ghettos, barrios and trailer parks. Old buildings are cleaned, painted white and a sunrise logo is put on the doors. Staff hand leaflets in groceries, knock on paint-blistered doors. People trickle into the centers. Nurses lead them to large rooms with soft mats, soft music and incense. A doctor tells them step by step what a psychedelic trip is and how it works. Along with treatment, they will get housing and food vouchers.

After the trip, a patient may lay in a field of flowers, staring at clouds. Worried friends and family gently touch their shoulders. Are they okay? Turning to the bewildered, the patient asks for forgiveness and also gives it. Staring at the sky, they feel connected to something larger.

Patients leave the psychedelic healing center as bright as lightbulbs. When they laugh, it shakes off fear like laundry snapped in the sun. A few leave their families to create a new self in the horizon. Some ask why so much hurt was visited on them. How did they get used to poverty, stigma and oppression?

Behind the buzz, doctors research patients' records. They sit red-eyed at the desk, slurping cold coffee, reading charts and prepping sessions. Curating music. Analyzing family dynamics. Cataloging key images and themes from prior sessions. Some reread Jacques Lacan, Patricia Clark, William E. Cross or Melanie Klein.

Outside the centers, reporters hold microphones in front of patients like wands. The Fox News journalists hope to catch a looney patient to prove that psychedelics are a fool's errand at best, poison at worst. Surprise, always surprise, at a serene human being deepened by an inner journey. Patting their chests, they say they feel like themselves; for the first time in their whole lives, they feel at home in their bodies. They stopped the meth, stopped the drinking, stopped the meanness. Smiling like a baby, many repeating the word "reborn."

■ ■ ■

At home, Dr. Iwosan plays a video interview of Rick Doblin, a pioneer founder of psychedelic therapy. "He was a veteran … disabled with PTSD for years. Friends of his had been killed in Iraq." Doblin opens his hands like an origami bird. "Under MDMA, he had this realization about PTSD. It was the way he showed loyalty to his friends who had died." He points at the table. "Suffering was a way to be bonded with them. But seeing himself from the eyes of his friends who had died, he realized they wouldn't want him to squander his life." Doblin raises a hand, as if gesturing to the afterlife. "They didn't have life anymore. They would want him to live as fully as possible, and he realized there was another way to honor his friends, which is to live. And in that moment, he cured himself of PTSD."

Iwosan pauses the video and remembers Kiesha clutching her cellphone, muscles taut as ropes, knotting herself around the memory of her brother. She loves him. She loves him and can't let go.

I got you, Keisha.

■ ■ ■

Days later, Iwosan guides Keisha to sit in the La-Z-Boy and asks about her brother. She turns each word carefully, like a burglar at a bank vault. Keisha soon stops talking to Iwosan and is in a full blown conversation with her brother. "Why didn't you stop fucking around with that crew? Why do you never listen? Why didn't you love us more than the street?"

Iwosan knows transference has begun. Keisha aims her words in a wobbly way from Iwosan to her brother. It's like watching a player at Luna Park in Coney Island holding a water gun, trying to hit the zombie face across the booth. She has something to say to her brother, and now is the time.

After a break, Keisha lies on the floor cushion.

"Ready?" Iwosan asks.

"Ready," Keisha nods.

Iwosan injects her with ketamine. The girl clutches her brother's balled-up T-shirt. The nurse spritzes lavender mist. Deep emotions wash over Keisha like tides erasing a sand sculpture. She is tossed on a big feeling, dashed against grief. At the peak, she feels a hand lift her. It's Kay, her brother. He is giant-sized. She hugs him, punches and curses him. He takes it all. He tells her, "Live, I want you to do what I can't. Live."

Blinking back tears, Keisha looks up.

"I saw him… " An exhausted smile spreads. "I saw him."

"He was looking for you." Iwosan strokes her sweaty forehead.

Later, Keisha gets on the A train. Turned inside out. I've been turned inside out. Eyes shut, she sees Kay. He is a pearl clamped by a shell, plucked out and freed.

■ ■ ■

The staff is transfixed by the TV. Dr. Iwosan rushes in and looks at the screen. Republican Ron DeSantis yells, "Psychedelic treatment centers brainwash people with critical race theory. Shut them down!"

Phones ring at the desk. Emails beep on computers. Clients stumble from rooms into the hallway, take off sleeping masks, and stare, confused.

The next day, Fox News chases staff with microphones as a doctor dashes into a car. Republicans call for the closure of the treatment centers and a recriminalization of psychedelics.

Across America, psychedelic therapy is demonized. At bars, boorish men yell over drinks that treatment centers poisoned America. At laundry mats, conservative newspapers make false stories of suicides front-page news. And run cartoons of communists pouring smoking test tubes of strange concoctions down people's throats.

By the end of the month, treatment directors hold a Zoom meeting. During it, they despaired at decades of retelling the story of psychedelics, wasted. Twiddling eyeglasses, one man said maybe they should temporarily shut down. A silence followed. It stank of fear.

No.

Dr. Iwosan, dressed in a business suit and cowrie shells, dreadlocks in a bun — says no. She tells them about a girl whose brother was shot. She had PTSD. After ketamine therapy, she finished school. "Are we going to take away her chance at a good life because racists lie about who we are?"

ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

■ ■ ■

Life.

Keisha leans on the windowsill and feels the summer sun. Her brown face is like a sunflower, soaking in light.

Life.

In her hand, sweat glitters like gold dust. Smiling, she turns to the mirror and pulls on the shirt with Bob Marley's Exodus album cover on the front. Next, Pan-African wristbands, ointment on the new tattoo of a lion and a pinky finger smoothing fresh cornrows. Total dap.

She sees Black beauty everywhere. Seeing Black. Tasting Black. Loving Black. The psychedelic trip, the books, the Malcolm X YouTube clips, the political chat rooms. Yeah, some of it flies over her head, but it adds to the change that was a long time coming, a re-centering of herself in what she actually wanted — pride in her body and its history.

On her way to a meeting, Keisha strides past drunks. Before they licked her with their eyes. Now they raise bottles in salute. "All right now." One wipes his mouth. "She a queen, now."

She stops, breathes and turns. "We all royalty."

"Not all." He takes a large swig of rum.

"Who taught you that?" She puts one foot on the step. "Who taught you to be less than what you are?" The words pierce the liquor haze. "I did the psychedelic treatment. Lots of friends got clean after the sessions. Check 'em out. If you are on Medicare, it's free."

"You grown." He puts the bottle down.

"Growing." She stands up and looks down the street. "Growing."

■ ■ ■

An ominous silence thickens the air. Dr. Iwosan drives to the Psychedelic Therapy Center. On building stoops, huddling over cellphones, Black folks murmured. The combinations don't make sense. Church ladies sit with drunks, MTA drivers with Hoteps, gay couples with hustlers. The same shadow passes across their faces.

She walks to one crew. A man grinds a fist into his palm. "Motherfuckers." An off-duty security guard shushes him. On the screen, Sen. Cory Booker says, "Today's Supreme Court decision overturned Brown v. Board of Education and the Voting Rights Act. We as a nation are in shock."

Iwosan's heart kicks, and a dizzy spell makes her sit.

What? What. What. How? Why?

■ ■ ■

The street is a held breath. Air is sucked backward and up. Nothing left to say. Nothing left to think.

Rage rises. New York sits on top of a volcano. The hairs on arms stand up. Scared people dash indoors.

Iwosan grips the windowsill and hears yelling in the street. Glass shatters. Gunshots echo. She feels the rage. It spins thought into a black hole that penetrates time itself. Ancient memory kicks inside her body. Countless enslaved ancestors crawl up her throat. No. No. No. Life is not worth living in a living death.

She runs down the stairs, the street and into a moving river of people. Black families in doorways pour into the movement. Flames twist from a police van; they are bright red and crackle in the eerie silence. On every face, the fire is reflected in thousands of eyes so it looks as if innumerable ignited torches are falling on the city.

"Exodus now!" Around her, fists thrust into the air. One has the a lion tattooed on forearm. Iwosan sees Keisha and zigzags to her. The young woman smiles, holds out a finger with a tab of LSD on it.

"Your turn, doctor."

Iwosan tongues the tab.

"We're not going back," Keisha says. "Healing showed me the cause of our pain was thinking this could ever be home." She makes a sweeping gesture to America. "Its heart has hardened. It will not let us go. Tonight, we are the pillar of fire. Tonight, we kill the pharaoh." She hugs Iwosan and moves deep into the march, gone.

Iwosan feels the end coming. All the weight she bore upon her shoulders since childhood becomes measurable exactly as it slides off. Racism, the waters she lived in. They molded her like an invisible sculptor. As a teen, she stood at the mirror and hated her midnight complexion. In college, she ran through white frat guys in college to prove she was desirable. In her career, she tiptoed around laws to be safe and respectable. Racism had her in its grip from the womb.

Racism heaped the nightmare of centuries on her. It would always exist, so she hedged bets to abide by it. Not tonight. Not anymore. Glancing from face to face, she knows that tonight, America is done. The people saw the darkness of slavery open beneath their feet. Just one law cracked, and the hell the ancestors survived reached for them anew.

Burn it. Burn it down.

The LSD kicks in and she climbs a streetlight. The people hit police barricades like a tsunami. Cops and riot shields fly into the air. Tear gas clouds twist around bodies like hands made of smoke. Thundering chants bowl up and down the avenues. Fire churns from the broken windows of City Hall.

The LSD erases layer after layer of her ego. Holding on to the light, Iwosan reaches fingertips out to the brewing revolution and wipes her face, tearing off the mask she wore her whole life. Black love swells like a sunrise. And it feels good.

A loud explosion tears the roof off the police station. Fire flares from more buildings. This is it. They are leaving America. Goodbye, baby. Adios.

Feeling crazy joy, she cries and laughs. And jumps into the march.

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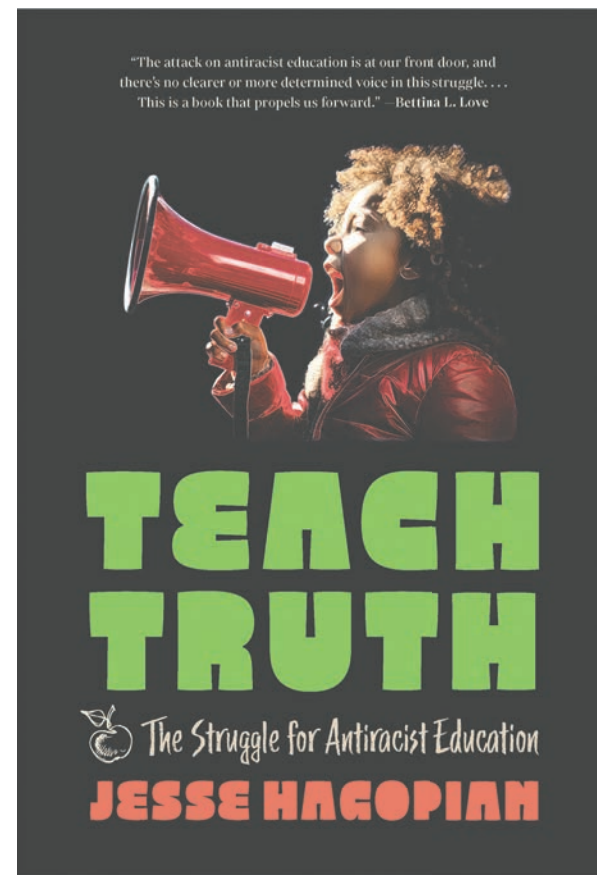
BOOKS

WHEN TEACHING ABOUT THE PAST BECOMES A 'TRUTHCRIME'

Teach Truth: The Struggle for Antiracist Education
By Jesse Hagopian
Haymarket Books; 320 pages
January 2025

By Eleanor J. Bader

Longtime organizer, educator and writer Jesse Hagopian's latest book, *Teach Truth*, is an incisive deconstruction of current rightwing efforts to limit teachers' ability to present accurate accounts of U.S. history to their students and to keep "controversial" books out of classrooms and libraries. The book offers moving and emotionally complex personal anecdotes that situate the author — whose ancestry includes people from Armenia and Africa — as someone whose dual lineage has been abridged, distorted and denied. Moreover, *Teach Truth* addresses the many ways that students, parents, unions, progressive activists and legal scholars are pushing back against educational gag orders, information suppression, and the doxxing and harassment of those who oppose conservative efforts.


"The attack on antiracist education is at our front door, and there's no clearer or more determined voice in this struggle. . . . This is a book that propels us forward." —Bettina L. Love
TEACH TRUTH
The Struggle for Antiracist Education
JESSE HAGOPIAN

Hagopian is a realist, albeit an optimistic one, and does not minimize the magnitude of today's rightwing backlash. He writes that almost half of all K-12 public school students are currently impacted by state and federal laws that forbid teachers from providing them with lessons about racism — including the horrors of slavery. The result, he writes, not only limits students' understanding of the foundational impact of race on our development as a country but also sends a secondary message, suggesting "that the troubled world they see around them is the best that can be achieved and that inequality is natural and inescapable." Lastly, Hagopian explains, in the rare instances in which racial bigotry is laid bare, it is typically presented as the result of personal biases rather than systemic flaws.

Curricula that comply with imposed restrictions send a disempowering message to students, argues Hagopian, calling it "uncritical race theory." Requisite to this is the denial of contemporary racism and the ways laws and social policies reinforce prevailing attitudes about power and human relations. He credits uncritical race theory with propping up colonialism, sanitizing social movements, and buttressing the often subtle assertions of white supremacy in education and beyond. Allusions to the United States as a "post-racial" or "color-blind" society add yet another distortion.

As disturbing as this is, Hagopian stresses that the United States has been in similar straits before, and the book does a deep dive into the ultimately unsuccessful Red and Lavender scares of decades past.

During the post-World War II era, he writes, a great deal of anti-communist and anti-queer animus was directed at teachers, with state legislatures throughout the country scrambling to pass more than 300 laws dealing with "subversive" practices. "This includes 28 states that mandated loyalty oaths for teachers, 38 states that passed general sedition laws, and 31 states that prohibited membership in 'subversive' groups." In some places, books deemed "offensive" were literally burned.

Still, Hagopian writes, "the eruption of the Civil Rights movement finally broke the handcuffs McCarthyism had cinched so tightly," leading to the development of a mass movement to demand school desegregation, ethnic studies classes and expanded student rights.

Fast-forward seven decades and a propulsive rightwing backlash has emerged. It's made significant headway: Hagopian reports that in addition to restricting history, English, and social studies curricula, at least 160 educators have been pushed out or fired for what he calls "truthcrimes," teaching the unvarnished truth about the United States' evolution since the first enslaved people were brought into the country in 1619.

It's a bleak finding, but Hagopian stresses the importance of keeping the long view in frame. The text reminds us that repression has always bred resistance, and the final section of the book, "Remembering," offers a host of examples of contemporary organizing to stop the right. These efforts, he writes, range from the creation of banned-book reading groups to lobbying state lawmakers in support of the right to read to supporting progressive school board candidates and organizing off-campus Black Lives Matter study groups that affirm the efficacy of teaching about race, class, gender identity, sexuality and social movements. Efforts like the annual Teach Truth Day of Action, coordinated by the Zinn Education Project; raucous protests at sites including the headquarters of the College Board; and Red, Wine, and Blue's ongoing organizing workshops for suburbanites highlight best practices for opposing retrenchment.

These efforts pit the well-organized and deep-pocketed right wing — and its allies in both the GOP and Democratic Parties — against progressive educators, students and community activists. And while it is obvious that the right currently has the upper hand, Hagopian does not believe it will prevail forever. Like the demise of the Red and Lavender scares of the 1950s, he foresees today's right wing withering away once well-organized parents, students and activists demand high-quality, multiracial public schools.

"Our society is in a liminal space between uncritical race theory and the forming of a great resistance against the very concept of truthcrime," Hagopian concludes. "Be assured when the next round of uprisings breaks through … truth teachers won't just be watching or even teaching about this rebellion — they will be in the streets with their students forming a sea of humanity that will shipwreck all the fears, lies, punishment, and demagoguery of uncritical race theorists."

Time will tell if this aspirational projection will come to fruition. Until then, while some teachers will undoubtedly self-censor or capitulate to the right, others will continue to push back in any way they can. They deserve our respect and support.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

RICHARD SWAFFORD

Dear Billy,
I can't believe Trump is president again. Is he the living evil? He seems to want to hurt people. I read that millions of South Africans are without their HIV medicine. They are locked out of their clinics because he's mad about something and cut off an aid program. How would someone want that to happen?

— MAYA

Dear Maya,
Many of us share your disbelief. Part of his evil is that it stuns us into standing still. He freezes us. Our perspective is stuck; we just can't believe it. When we are unable to move and groove, then we are a sitting duck for his lying ass. Here's one lie: He wants us to believe that he is one man with one idea. Actually, if we tear our eyes off of him, start whirling around and go back into the world... we quickly see that there are a thousand Donald Trumps. And you know what? We have got a job to do here, for each other, to help and to heal. We have to live in a neighborhood that refuses to die, that comes back to life!

Maybe someday we will give and give until we live in a nation of neighborhoods that refuse to die. Right now, we don't have to guess at the big vision. Samuel R. Delany says that if you walk by the same person three times, on the third time, stop and offer your name. The morning after Trump's election, a very tired looking AOC urged us to go back to our neighborhood, our family, our loved ones, our pod — and be sure those intimate relationships are strong. Right now, we are mesmerized by this one man — but to get back to our own good work, we have to be in motion. In fact, we need to dance and laugh, and when we do this with abandon, we suddenly see that we are not alone; our loves are laughing in motion too. How would our perspective shift if we looked away from him and took in the world with new eyes, eyes that come from looking out at the world with our loved ones looking with us? Then we see beyond this one damaged soul, and we notice that the air itself is harmed. The environment of our culture is going insane, in scary unity with the environment of the Earth.

The space between the murderers is the air that we are forced to breathe, and it is the space where we learn to believe. We must help each other continue our breathing and singing and stay in motion. We need to stay in action together in this poisoned public landscape that is now breaking into fire and flood — we need to stay as active as the Earth is active. We have the Earth and its current, sometimes violent dance as our teacher. And we emerge from the rubble of the latest disaster with our radical giving. The Earth is creating gift economies with Hurricane Helene and the Los Angeles fires. Our disregard for the lives of others produced the hate of Trump. But we don't have to continue with this distancing. It's back to the love that started it all. *Can I help you? Do you have bandages? I have an extra blanket…*

The air we breathe can have our attention as we move through it and pledge that we will be radical enough to protect it, to keep it breathable.

Maya, did you follow that? Your name, it says here, comes from Sanskrit and it means "illusion" and "magic." We have to look away from the evil and start anew. At first it will seem like dreaming, but if we do it together, it will become dancing. I wish the best for you. We all have such work to do. Earthalujah!

— REV

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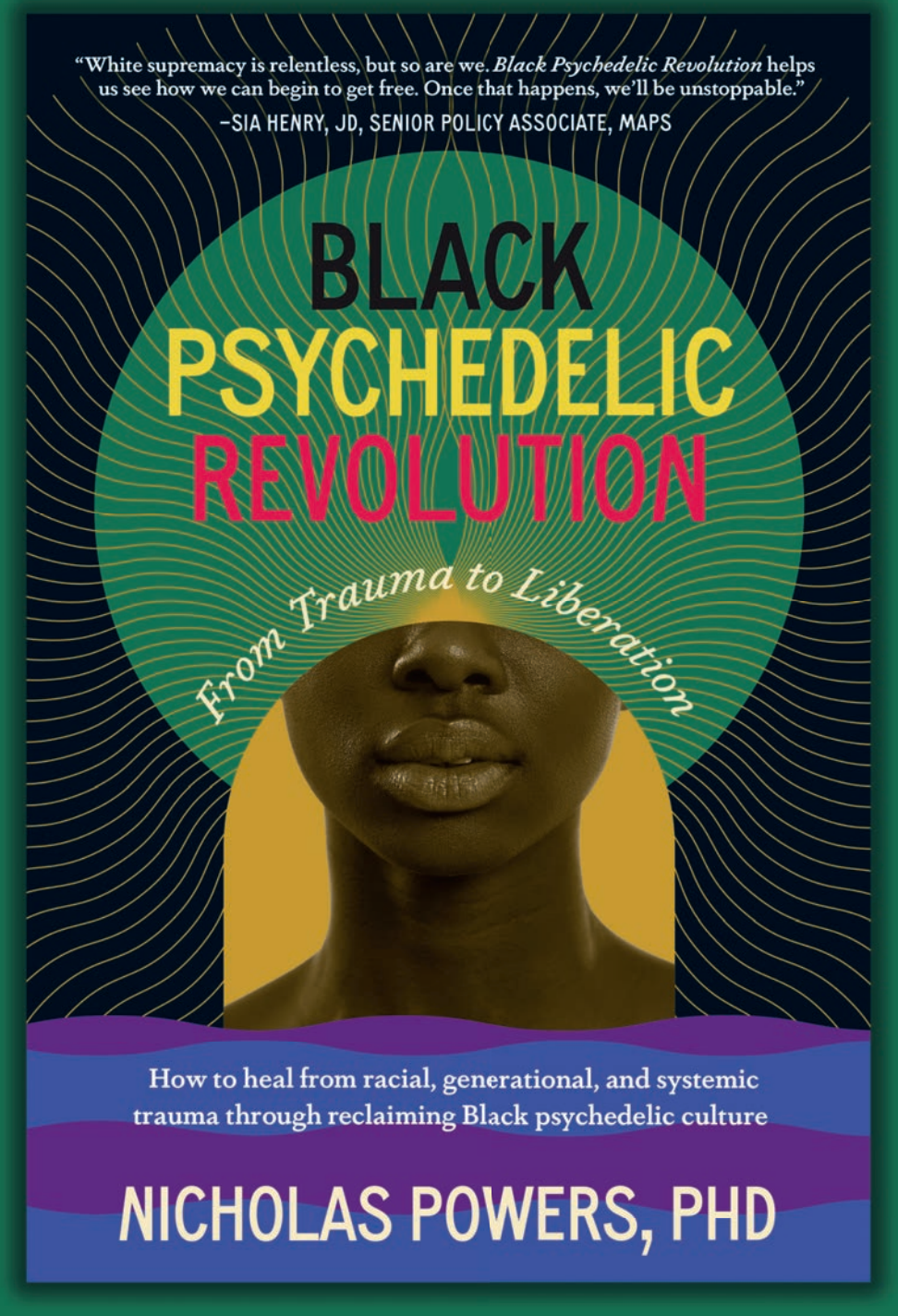
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